

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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VEDIC PRAYERS

चिदसि मनोसि धीरसि दक्षिणासि
क्षत्रियासि यज्ञियास्यदितिरस्युभयतः शीर्ष्णी ।
सा नः सुप्राची सुप्रतीच्येधि मित्रस्त्वा
पदि बध्नीतां पूषाध्वनस्पात्विन्द्रायाध्यक्षाय ॥
—Śukla Yajur Veda, 4.19

O Mother! You are divine Knowledge itself; you are the mind; you are *dhi*, the source of spiritual knowledge; you are compassionate and bring success to our noble actions. You are the powerful protectress (*kṣatriyā*); you are the sacrifice; you are infinite (*aditi*) and all-pervading. Please come before us and make our minds drawn towards you. May the Sun (ie, enlightened knowledge) bind you to our hearts. May Pūṣā protect us from falling into bad ways in order to please the Lord of all.

अनु त्वा माता मन्यतामनु पितानु
भ्राता सगर्भेऽनु सखा सयूथ्यः ।
सा देवि देवमच्छेहीन्द्राय सोमं रुद्र-
स्त्वावर्त्तयतु स्वस्ति सोमसखा पुनरेहि ॥
—Śukla Yajur Veda, 4.20

O Mother! May all mothers follow you. May all fathers, brothers, relatives, friends and others follow you. O Mother! Grant us godly qualities, so that we may please the supreme Lord. May Rudra become benevolent towards us. May everything be favourable to us. You are the friend of Soma, the pure; please come to us again.

Two Mantras of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*

EDITORIAL

The Only Goal of Life

Sri Ramakrishna has declared: 'The aim of life is the attainment of God. ... Even unselfish work is only a means; it is not the end. ... Devote yourself to spiritual practice and go forward (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 453). The one goal of life is to cultivate love for God (*Gospel*, p. 94).'

If we introspect dispassionately, we shall see for ourselves that Sri Ramakrishna's words are true. Our introspection will tell us that we must seek something higher, for we have wasted our time in vain pursuits. People may say we are great achievers, but our own lives tell us that our struggle for survival, for money, and for fame have led us nowhere. On the contrary, all our efforts have only added to our misery. Problems like nervous breakdown, frustration, stress, conflicts, quarrels, meaninglessness, etc are all owing to our having no great goal in life.

So if we don't have a higher purpose or goal in life, all our efforts are like the madman's trying to empty the ocean.

But there's a difficulty here. Some of those who indeed have higher goals in life know that in this post-modern era, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live for a higher ideal or to concentrate on the Divine. It is becoming almost impossible to give our minds to higher things because the day-to-day struggle for survival itself is taking a heavy toll of our lives. All our energies are being dissipated in achieving petty goals. This being the situation, how can people with family, work, and other responsibilities think of God or higher goals in life?

Our compassionate sages knew our problems. So they have left instructions about how to live in this stressful world.

How to Live for an Ideal?

Suppose you are a rare individual not after money or fame, but have an ideal in life. But since you have family responsibilities, you don't know how to live up to that ideal. What should you do then? In the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, there are wonderful guidelines to lead purposeful lives amidst the turmoil of the world. A few simple changes that the Upaniṣad suggests, and we shall be masters of any situation. Let's study the first two mantras of this Upaniṣad. We shall be surprised to see how the Upaniṣad is directly addressing us!

The first mantra says:

*Īśā vāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ
yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhuñjithā
mā grdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam.*

The First Principle: God

The first word in this mantra is *īśa* or God. Whatever we are, however big we may be, our first and fundamental anchor should be God. Having faith in God is the most fundamental necessity for us. Why?

With our limited powers and strength we can't achieve much in life. Our little egos are incapable of achieving anything at all. If we depend upon our egos, all that happens is, they go on increasing in size like a balloon into which air is being pumped: a small pinprick will puncture it. And we are gone.

Shall we depend upon other people then? Every human being, however great we may think he or she is, is a bundle of desires and emotions. All are weak and helpless. All live inside their own cocoons. All are suffering in this world. Whom shall we depend upon?

But why God? All of us want three things in this life. One, we want to exist for all time. Two, we don't want to exist like stones: we want to know things. Three, we want bliss or

enjoyment. So being, knowledge and bliss are our three aspirations, manifesting in different forms; and the word 'God' is used to refer to the infinite source of all this. He is called *sat-cit-ānanda*, infinite being-knowledge-bliss. Again, God is the word used for the unseen power that, using only a minuscule of that power, creates, rules and runs and controls everything in this vast universe. He is *īśa*, the absolute controller of everything.

So the first condition for real growth is faith in God. Now, if you are a Christian or a Sikh or a Muslim reading this, you will remark: 'We have only one God and none other. Which God are you talking about?' It is the same one God that we are speaking about. It's wrong to conclude that Vedanta or Hinduism speaks of innumerable gods and goddesses. No. Vedanta says that there is only one supreme God. But just as you don't kill your little child if it makes a mistake, God also will not kill the poor simple Hindu if he or she worships Him in different forms. Let people worship Him in different ways. The destination of all rivers is the ocean, isn't it?

Next, is it enough to have faith in God? Faith, as saints say repeatedly, is a potential force. Our faith should motivate us to do something more: We should seek Him too.

This leads us to the second principle of the Upaniṣad: '*Īśā vāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ*, envelop everything in God.'

The Second Principle: The Universe

We have faith in God and we seek Him. But where to find Him? Since He is the source and controller of *everything*, we must try to see Him in everything and everywhere. Is it possible to see God everywhere in this world? See the variety in this world; see the dirt, squalor, trouble, noise, disease, misery. Can we see God here? Yes, we can, says the Upaniṣad, and teaches us how to do that.

It says: '*Īśā vāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ*, cover everything with God.' What is 'everything'? '*Yat kiñca jagatyām jagat*, whatever is changing in this world.' Everything that undergoes change should be enveloped in God. Now,

what remains if everything that changes is covered with God? God alone!

It's once again a question of outlook. We learnt that we shouldn't depend on our so-called prowess but on God; we should change our outlook towards the world too: we should try to see God in it. So we should envelop everything in God. Our eyes should search for God in everything, always.

What all will happen if we try to see God thus? (a) We shall begin to neglect the faults which appear to our eyes. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says: 'My child, if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Find your own faults.' It is this fault-finding that brings all unrest and trouble. Once we envelop everything in God, we begin to see God's play in everything. We ignore minor, soiled things, and our mind will not be disturbed with small items. Rather, we shall begin to enjoy God's sport even in adversity. (b) The idea of everything being sacred and holy comes to us. We begin to respect life. All our thoughts and actions will consequently undergo transformation. We begin to do whatever we had been doing earlier with a higher motive, with a new dedication and devotion. (c) We expand. When we try to find that everything is pervaded by God Himself, whose name is Infinity, our narrowness goes away. (d) We begin to love. Swami Vivekananda says: 'What is life but growth, ie, expansion, ie, love?' Everything becomes an object of love for us. The more we express our love, the more will our life find fulfilment. (e) We begin to serve everyone earnestly. By serving others, thinking of them as God Himself, we grow spiritually. (f) We begin to realize that behind this ever-changing scene, there's something permanent. Our body and mind too undergo transformation constantly. But that doesn't mean we shall be annihilated. We shall hold on to the eternal behind the transitory.

Thus (i) we have faith in God and (ii) we see Him behind the changing universe. By holding on to what is true and lasting, we shall experience lasting peace and happiness. This

is what the Upaniṣad teaches.

How to live in this world then? Knowing that it is ever-changing, shall we run away from it? And where shall we go? What will happen to our people?

No, we needn't have to run away anywhere. Against popular belief, Vedānta is not escapist. The Upaniṣad itself says this now.

The Third Principle: Ourselves

The Upaniṣad says: '*Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā*, hence renounce and enjoy.' The world is there in front of us. We know it is changing. But we needn't run away from it. The Upaniṣad says: 'Experience the goods of the world. Enjoy the world, but only know that it's all impermanent.' Knowing that things are not lasting, we will enjoy them with a difference: we will be detached.

Once we know the real nature of things, we don't get attached to them and come to grief when something is gone. Such true awareness of impermanence, and hence not getting attached to anything, is called *tyāga*. Attachment is ignorance, and leads to misery. Having no attachment and enjoying what comes of itself, we don't covet anything at all. We are happy with what we get. That's what the Upaniṣad teaches us next.

The Fourth Principle: Desire

The fourth principle or teaching of the Upaniṣad is, '*mā grdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam*, don't desire anyone's possessions.' We generally see that others are more happy than us. We say: 'All are beautiful and handsome; all have cars and mobile phones; all have wealth; but we don't have anything. We alone are left out.' This want makes us covet other people's wealth and possessions. The Upaniṣad advises us against it. The first reason is impermanence. Secondly, with all their possessions, who is happy in this world? Those of us who try to see God in everything alone are peaceful and happy. Thirdly, desire brings bondage in its train. According to all the scriptures of the world, it is desire alone that leads to suffering and bondage. Desire leads to action, action leads to *saṁskāras*, they in turn lead to fresh

desires, and thus the chain goes on. Fourthly, whose wealth is all this? Everything belongs to God because He is the *īśa*, the controller, of everything. If we hold on to Him, everything will come to us in time.

Now you will ask: 'Since we should not covet or desire anything, what's the need of struggling in this world? Moreover, why such disparity—neighbours have wealth and I don't?' The Upaniṣad answers this in the second mantra, a great mantra about karma. It says that everything goes according to your karma or past actions.

The Fifth Lesson: Work

'*Kurvan eva iha karmāṇi jijīviṣet śataṁ samāḥ*, by working alone you have to desire to live here for a full hundred years.' Work constantly, says the Upaniṣad. Work will make us learn, to improve ourselves, to become free from the consequences of past karma, and also to be healthy and happy. By knowing God to be behind everything, we work with knowledge: we do God's work. Intelligent work will annul bad actions of the past and will not add new ones. In this way we can remain healthy and hearty for a long time.

Therefore the Upaniṣad adds: '*Evam tvayi nānyatheto asti na karma lipyate nare*. This is your way and none else. By doing this, you will not be bound by actions.'

Thus the Upaniṣad says that we should (a) have absolute faith in God that He is the doer, (b) cover everything with God, (c) give up desiring the impermanent but enjoy what comes of itself, (d) never desire other people's possessions, and (e) work properly to live a full life. This is living fruitfully, truly and eternally in knowledge and supreme bliss.

'What if I don't?'

Suppose we say: 'I don't want to see God in everything; I don't want to give up desires; I don't want to work selflessly,' etc. The Upaniṣad says: 'If you want to kill your Self by not doing all this, you will go to blinding darkness, that's all.' Choosing between light and darkness is the choice before us. □

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Savage Virtues of Indians

Mr G.B. Grinnell had lived in India for a long time. What was his opinion about us 'savages'? Grinnell wrote in the January 1899 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*: 'It is true that Indians are savages and have savage vices; but they also have savage virtues, many of which are admirable; among them honesty, bravery, hospitality, consideration for their neighbours, family affection, and fidelity—the keeping of pledged faith even with an enemy. These people have a respect for their promises which seems remarkable to a white man. A liar is regarded with contempt, and when a man has once been detected in an untruth it is almost impossible for him to regain his reputation. Often when I ask a man to tell me a sacred story, he sits silent for a while, to arrange his ideas. Then he holds his palms up towards the sun, and passes them over his head, arms, and body. Then he prays: "O Wise One above, listen. Earth, listen. All you spiritual powers, listen. Take pity on me. Help me. I am going to talk to this man. I am going to tell him a story of ancient times, of the things which used to happen a long time ago. Help me to talk straight to him. Watch me, and do not let me tell a lie. Make me tell these things just as they used to be. Listen carefully, and make me tell him the truth."' "

Truth-keeping Murderers of India

Mr Grinnell further writes: 'Among the civilized tribes of India, if a man kills one of his fellows, he is tried by the tribal court, and if convicted, is sentenced to be shot. The day for his execution having been fixed, he is released on parole and goes away, promising to be present at the place of execution at the appointed time. He is always there. In a case recently reported, the convict was a member of a famous ball team which had engagements running through the summer. He was sentenced to die early in August, but in view of the inconvenience which his death would cause to the ball team, he was reprieved until the last days of October so that he might fulfil his engagements with the team. After being sentenced, he married the girl on whose account he had killed his rival, set his affairs in order, played the different games of ball, and on the morning set for his execution, went alone to the ground and paid the penalty of death.'

How Safe was Property with the Savage Indians?

So the 'wild Indian' was more humane and less savage than he was supposed to be! Here's another instance, again from Grinnell. 'Nowhere in the world was property more safe than in the old-time Indian camp. ... The Indians of today have picked up from white people many of the white people's ways, and are not always honest, but they do not yet take things from one another or from their guests.' This was said in 1899. (Quoted from *The Review of Reviews*, February 1899, p. 161).

Ramakrishna Museum, Belur Math

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY MOST REVERED PRESIDENT MAHARAJ

To preserve the memory of the great pioneers of the Ramakrishna Movement and cherish the great contributions they made, as well as to place before the public the ideals of this Movement, the Ramakrishna Museum was opened on 13 May 1994 in an old building at Belur Math. However, it was soon felt that in order to display more exhibits in a systematic way and in a congenial environment, a new building would be necessary. Thus the foundation-stone for the new museum and archives was laid on 4 February 1996 by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Order, and the building was formally opened on 7 May 2001 by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the present President.

The Ramakrishna Museum is in proud possession of various articles used by the founders of the Ramakrishna Movement as well as some related original manuscripts. It is believed that by going around the museum, visitors will not only be able to feel the living presence of these great souls but also grasp the dynamic spirit that pervades all the activities of the Ramakrishna Movement.

The following is the text of Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj's inaugural address on the opening of the new Ramakrishna Museum.

Devotees and Friends,

I am very happy to be here for this opening ceremony. I came from Bangalore just for this occasion. We have heard the description of this beautiful museum from Swami Prabhananda and Dr Ghosh. There are plenty of museums in India and abroad, but a very important subject is depicted in this one. When the Buddha appeared a new movement started, and now we have so many museums and monuments dedicated to his achievements and to the love and compassion he had for all beings. Today this museum is a reality, and it will help to create a new world order. It is not simply a record of the past century. Rather, it is recording a new era in India as well as the whole world. For, Sri Ramakrishna came for the whole world—not for India alone. Therefore, the world will soon begin to see some great things happening, such as unity and peace among humanity, the awareness of the divinity of man, and harmony among religions.

The great teachings of Ramakrishna and

Swamiji will spread throughout the whole world through this kind of museum. So, it is an inspiration for the future and it will create a new kind of future, a new world order—and not just for India, but for the world at large. That is why Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji came. All this is reflected in the museum.

I am very happy to see the city of Sri Ramakrishna depicted here—with the Cossipore garden house, the Baranagore ashram, Belur Math and other Math centres where the movement started. The museum shows how the movement started, how it is spreading, and how it is working for the future. This is a great inspiration for all of us.

Today is a special day. It is the Buddha's birthday. Two thousand five hundred years ago, the great Buddha was born and created a new world order. The Buddha, Jesus Christ, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were all great divinities as well as history-makers. They created a new world. They did not merely repeat what others had done before them, but they started

new movements. Now, with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, we again find that a new world has started—and this time it is spreading not just in India but all over the world. His teachings are spreading through literature and with museums such as this.

Earlier world teachers came to us through legends and mythology interspersed with history. We do not even know how they looked. Swami Vivekananda has referred to this in one of his lectures. Through the chiselling and modelling of thousands of years their lives have come to us. The life of Sri Ramakrishna has no mythology about it. We even have several of his photographs. We also have record of writings of scholars like Pandit Shivanath Sastri and others published during his life, and great western scholars like Max Mueller and Romain Rolland wrote wonderful books about him a few years later. Then there is the *Kathamrita* written by M. and the *Lilaprasanga* by Swami Saradananda. Books testifying to his greatness are still being written.

There are so many inspiring books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It is this kind of literature that creates a new world order, for great souls like Sri Ramakrishna create new movements. They don't just repeat what others have done. Sri Ramakrishna was a history-maker—a divinity and a history-maker combined, in the way that the Buddha was. The Buddha also started a new movement, a new

world order. In those days Indian ideas were not confined to India alone. Monks from India travelled around the world carrying nothing with them but the Buddha's message of peace and harmony. This is the kind of message India has spread throughout the world, again and again.

We find that in the modern age the world has been united by various technologies, but people's minds have not been united. There is still so much violence in the world. But that

will be changed when the message of this movement spreads far and wide. Now, with this museum, we have a new source of inspiration for the Ramakrishna Movement. I am sure this museum will be a great instrument in spreading the message of harmony and peace throughout



the world.

I convey my best wishes to Swami Prabhananda. He has taken a lot of trouble to make this museum a reality, and I am happy that he has been successful in completing it. And now we are enjoying the opening ceremony of a great museum in the holy atmosphere of Belur Math. I am happy that so many distinguished people have come. You may go round the museum. Here all are welcome, without distinction of caste, creed or nationality.

May Sri Ramakrishna's blessings be on all of us.

Namaskar and thank you. □

With whatever evil tendencies one may come, one is sure to improve in holy company. When you go into a perfume shop, the scent will enter your nostrils, whether you will it or not.

—Swami Turiyananda

How to Make India Strong?

DR A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister and recipient of the prestigious Bharata Ratna award, had visited Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore, on 21 January 2001. This is a slightly edited transcription of his talk, delivered in the presence of a large number of students and invited guests.

I am indeed delighted to be in a place like Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, which is very close to my heart. It is a place where science and spirituality work together. This type of value system is very important. It is said, 'If you have integrity nothing else matters, if you don't have integrity nothing else matters.'

When I entered this campus, I saw nature, swamijis, students and everyone smiling. My greetings to all of you. Smile is fantastic. It is the only thing you can give freely. It doesn't cost you anything. If you smile, you radiate happiness. Once you radiate happiness, all the surrounding is ignited with happiness. Without smile, friendship, happiness and good life are not possible. May God bless you.

I shall narrate an incident, which happened when I was like you. At Madras Institute of Technology, I opted for science as it enriches human life and establishes contact and friendship among different technologies. After physics, I took aeronautical engineering. My ambition then was to fly in the air. I wanted to be above the earth. I applied for the interview and got an interview card. It was a very rigorous interview and was held at Dehradun. They tested physical and intellectual aspects in a competitive spirit. The candidates were shortlisted to twelve. Eleven were to be selected. I was told that invariably one or more may be disqualified because of health reasons. To my misfortune I was that one. Very dejected and disappointed, I returned via Rishikesh. I took a bath in the Ganges there and was wearing a dhoti. There was a beautiful ashram near by, Swami Sivananda's

ashram. I was tempted to enter that ashram and I entered. There was a lecture going on, on the *Bhagavadgita*. The swami used to select a person among the audience for discussion everyday after bhajan and prayer. It was my chance that day. The swami noticed me, that there was a feeling of sorrow on my face. I told him the details. He consoled me, taking an instance from the *Gita*. 'Lord Krishna revealed his *vishwarupa* to Arjuna who was fear-stricken. Krishna's message to him was "to defeat defeatism."' This became a message to me even.

India is a developing country. In order to make India strong, we must feel that we should become strong. We should not allow ourselves to be subjugated. We must dream, and transform our dreams into thoughts. Thoughts will result in action. Swami Vivekananda did not simply preach. He was a man of action. India has an abundance of natural and human resources. Value addition to this would result in the generation of wealth. It could transform the country and make it a developed nation. The youth below 35 years, who form the majority of the population, could be a powerful tool.

India must be freed from the shackles of poverty. If the transformation has to take place in India, the GDP growth rate should grow up from the present six percent to eleven percent. Villages must be transformed and made attractive for investors. Rural areas must be well connected and telecommunication access should be provided. Youngsters dreamt of a free India during the freedom struggle, and

today's youngsters should have a vision of a developed India.

Scientists and experts from various fields have identified core areas for development to transform the Indian society into a knowledge-based one. The shift to a knowledge-based society would effect a transformation in the society and eventually lead to the creation of wealth. Information technology and communication networks have to play an important role. There will be a convergence of biotechnology and bio-science in this knowledge-based society. This will benefit service sectors like information and entertainment.

The major disadvantage of India according to the Technology Information Forecasting Assessment Council (TIFAC) is, 70 per cent of our population is in the rural sector, out of which 40 per cent is below the poverty line. In order to overcome this, the council suggests that India focus more on four core issues—agriculture and food processing, education, health, and digital governance. While agriculture and food processing ensure food and nutritional security, education and health will bring in integrity and social security.

Friends, when you are haunted by cul-

tural invasions through media and elsewhere, think of yourselves as children of civilizational bliss. We withstood multiple invasions though many dynasties ruled us. Today, India is free from invasions and is independent. We cherish family values and spiritual life. Many developed nations are dreaming of such a full life. Our philosophy is, 'Give them and go on living.'

Friends, when you hear the exaggerated turbulence in our society, have courage to feel that we are a nation of a billion people with multiple religions and languages. We are the largest democracy of continuity on this planet. No other nation has this unique strength of our experience. Experience is a resource for peace. Spread this beautiful message everywhere.

Friends, you are a mighty force for the nation. Your sweat will transform developing India into a developed nation. That is the vision, **INDIAN MILLENNIUM MISSION 2020—A DEVELOPED INDIA**. Remember the famous saying of a poet, 'When I work, God honours me.' Let us work for a developed India. □

The Calling of a Citizen

Consider who you are. First, a man; that is, one who has nothing more sovereign than will, but all else subject to this, and will itself free from slavery or subjection. Consider then from what you are parted by reason. You are parted from wild beasts, you are parted from sheep. On these terms you are a citizen of the universe and a part of it; not one of those marked for service, but of those fitted for command; for you have the faculty to understand the divine governance of the universe and to reason on its sequence.

What then is the calling of a citizen? To have no personal interest, never to think about anything as though he were detached, but to be like the hand or the foot, which, if they had the power of reason and understood the order of nature, would direct every impulse and every process of the will by reference to the whole. That is why it is well said by philosophers that if the good man knew coming events beforehand he would help on nature, for he would realize that, by the ordering of the universe, this task is allotted him.

—Epictetus

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Swami Smarananandaji is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited the Ramakrishna Order's centres in America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs. This is the seventh in the series.

SAN FRANCISCO - III

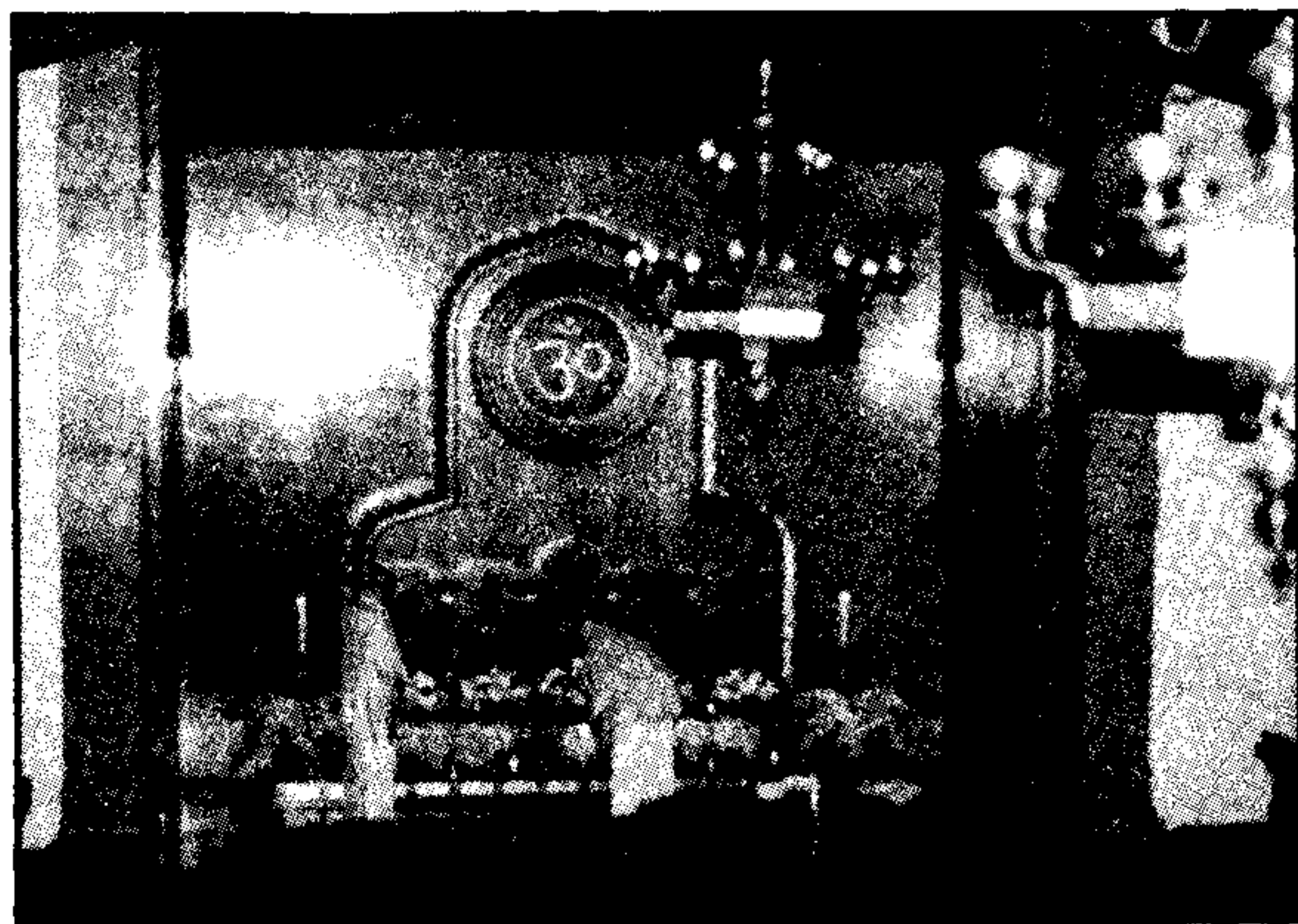
The Centennial Inter-faith Meet took place on 29 May 2000 morning at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco. The shamiana was full. More than 1,200 people attended the event. There were speakers from Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism,

able speed, and it was all over in no time.

On 31st morning, Swami Prabuddhananda took me to see some spots in the Olema retreat. The so-called 'temple site' has been kept reserved for a future temple. It is on the top of the hill and is surrounded by a thick forest. The women's retreat is a beautiful building, all in wood, in a marvelous setting. The retreatants come and stay for a few days, cooking their own food, for which necessary arrangements, including micro-ovens, are available.

Next day we left for Shanti Ashrama. It took some two hours to reach the place. Shanti Ashrama is a mountain retreat. Situated in the San Antone Valley amidst mountains, this 140-acre retreat was presented to Swami Vivekananda by a devotee in 1900. The same year, Swami Vivekananda left behind Swami Turiyananda, another disciple

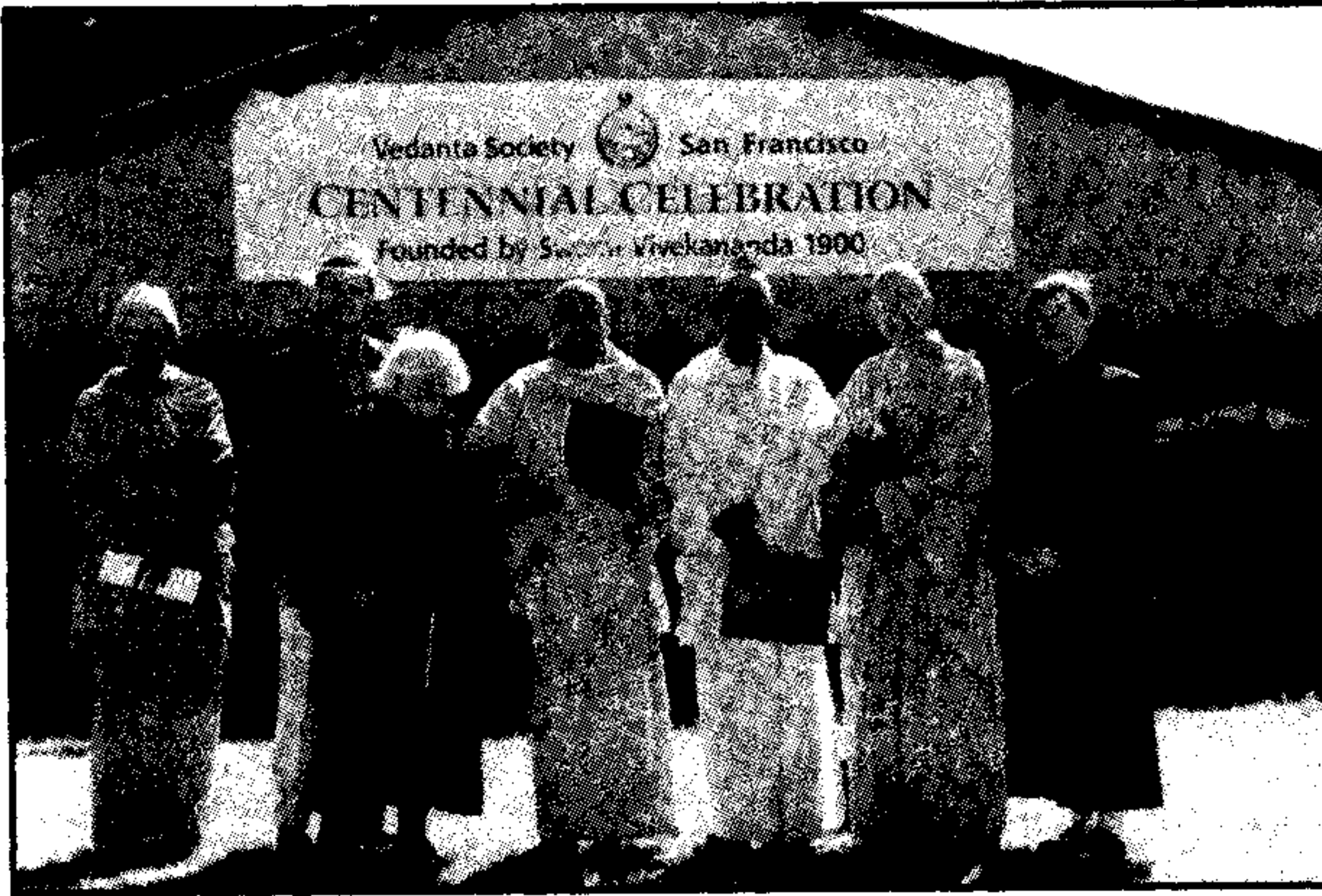
of Sri Ramakrishna, to stay there, teach Vedanta, and live Vedanta. Swami Turiyananda took some hand-picked devotees to this place. In this arid wilderness with a sprinkling of red pines, tents were pitched, cabins were built, and a rigorous life of work and meditation followed. In 1952, a wild forest fire destroyed some of the cabins. Now there are five of them; one is a chapel, the other is a kitchen, and the remaining three are for living. Water is a prob-



Inter-faith Meet: Inauguration by the author with floral offering at the altar

Sufism, and, of course, Vedanta, on which I spoke. The Meet was held in two sessions, morning and afternoon. The audience participated keenly, asking plenty of questions in good humour.

The next day's programme was termed 'Karma Yoga', ie, active participation in the dismantling of the pandals, etc, and rearranging the campus. With all kinds of gadgets in use, the work was accomplished with remark-



The author (third from right) with swamijis and Inter-faith Meet participants

lem here. Our lunch was no problem because we had carried food and water. We returned to San Francisco by 5 in the afternoon.

I felt that Shanti Ashrama is indeed a place for prayer and meditation! The solitude and silence could be enjoyed by one whose mind is tuned to God and not by others. Had there been some water, it could have been possible to live here like Thoreau.

Next morning, we (the same Shanti Ashrama party) left for Lake Tahoe, some 200 miles away. It is at a height of 6,500 ft above sea level. The lake is surrounded by moun-

tains all around, some of them with streaks of snow. The lake is 22 miles long and 14 miles wide, and is very deep. It is a popular tourist spot in summer. Here the Vedanta Society of Northern California has a retreat of more than 100 acres, the area covered by fir and pine trees. There are three cottages, one of them for women retreatants. The place was acquired in 1935 by Swami Ashokananda, then head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California.

In the evening, we left for a 100-mile-long tour around the lake. The path lies amidst wonderful scenery. We went up to a height of 8,200 ft by cable car, from where a fantastic view of the lake and the mountains around could be seen.

Sarvadevananda and Prasun left early next morning for Hollywood. We left at 9:15 am, and halted at the Vedanta Society of Sacramento. Swami Prapannananda is the head of this centre. Swami Prabuddhananda and others returned to San Francisco, while I stayed back at Sacramento.

(to be continued)



Dhuni place at Shanti Ashrama:
The author with Swami Vedananda and others

Śaṁkara and His Modern Interpreters

S. VITTALA SASTRI

Did Śaṁkara speak of mūlāvidyā or original ignorance? Or was it a later interpolation? Sri S. Vittala Sastri wrote an absorbing article in the July 1941 number of The Philosophical Quarterly. Please read this interesting discussion, a gem from yesteryears.

It has been the misfortune of Śaṁkara, like some of the great philosophers of the world, to be misunderstood by his own followers. As interpreted today, Śaṁkara is responsible for a peculiar speculative system of which he is perfectly innocent.

Almost all presentations of Śaṁkara's system, whether by the commentators or by the translators, whether by adverse critics influenced by the later *bhāṣyakāras* (please refer to the analysis of *Śrī Bhāṣya* by Ramanujachari) or by independent exponents guided by original scholars now speak of the *māyavāda* as the central doctrine of Advaita. Advocates of Śaṁkara seem to talk enthusiastically in defence of what is known as the *mūlāvidyā* or *māyā* which they evidently regard as the corner-stone of the system, while the opponents appear to feel no less shocked at the very mention of the word. It may be said that for some centuries a fierce fight has been raging around this chimerical principle of *mūlāvidyā*.

And yet, it would appear that the great thinker knew nothing whatever of this wonderful *mūlāvidyā*. Translations of almost all the genuine works of Śaṁkara are now available, and one searches in vain in the great *bhāṣyas* to find even the faintest trace of such a doctrine. More than 10 years ago Sri Y. Subrahmanya Sarma threw, in his *Śaṁkara Hṛdaya* or *Mūlāvidyā-Nirāsa*, a challenge to Sanskrit

scholars to produce a single quotation from Śaṁkara, or at least to adduce cogent reasons in support of this blessed theory, and that challenge remains unanswered still. He has very recently brought out a Kannada book discussing this point at length and showing the utter hollowness of the contention that Śaṁkara ever countenanced this ruinous stop-gap devised by later Vedāntins.



It would be necessary to examine this *mūlāvidyā* doctrine a little in detail in order to distinguish it from the genuine doctrine of *avidyā* taught by Śrī Śaṁkara. No two teachings could be so dissimilar as the theories of *avidyā* and *mūlāvidyā*. For Śaṁkara, *avidyā* means no more and no less than the mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-Self and the mistaken transference of the characteristics of the one to the other. This superimposition and transference is, according to him, due to a natural tendency in us which can be rooted out only by the realization of the truth of Advaita or of the one highest Reality without a second. The philosophic grandeur and significance of this theory cannot be explained, I fear, in the space of a short paper like this. I shall therefore content myself with the remark that Śaṁkara relies entirely on facts of life and experience to show how our real Self as witness of the three states or *avasthās*—waking, dream and deep sleep—transcends all

limitations and is in fact the one metaphysical reality in search of which all philosophy has been at work ever since we began to think.

In perfect contrast with this is the *mūlāvidyā* theory bolstered up by the neo-Vedantins in the name of Śaṅkara. They have quietly assumed the oneness of reality, and in order to account for the plurality experienced in life, they postulate a primeval nescience, the *mūlāvidyā*, which is the cause of all phenomena including the superimposition of the Self and the not-Self referred to above. This *avidyā* is root-ignorance in that it is the cause, the material cause, that gives rise to all the various ignorances attaching to individuals in everyday life. It is not my ignorance or your ignorance, but the universal beginningless ignorance, residing in Brahman or pure consciousness, and it is called *avidyā*, because it is admitted to be sublated by *vidyā* or the knowledge of Brahman.

One detects here at once the influence of the realistic Sāṅkhya, for the conception of cause so naively introduced militates against the strictly non-dualistic teaching of the Upaniṣads according to Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara who have shown the untenability of all causation whatever from the highest standpoint of Vedānta. But our friends have carefully glossed over their theory of causation so that it may not offend against the feelings of any conscientious followers of Śaṅkara. This *mūlāvidyā*, it is averred, is not transcendently real but only empirically so, and even as such, it neither is nor is not. Again, it is not distinct from Brahman in which case it would militate against the oneness of Reality, nor is it identical with Brahman seeing that it serves as the cause of the phenomenal world. The causal *avidyā* being thus indescribable in nature, its effect embracing the stream of superimpositions on the one hand and the objective world on the other, partakes of its nature also and is equally indescribable; hence it is claimed that the possibility of the total disappearance of *avidyā* and all its effects at the dawn of knowledge.

But here again the doctrine is faced with an insurmountable difficulty of a more serious nature. How are we to be sure that knowledge will disperse all ignorance of this type? Is there any enlightened soul who has got rid of all *avidyā* and who can point out to us the way of acquiring the knowledge of Brahman? This natural question put to the advocates of *mūlāvidyā* makes them very uncomfortable. For if one has completely annihilated *avidyā* he cannot perceive our world which is admittedly the effect of *avidyā*, and if there be no enlightened teacher who can prove the truth of Vedānta to us, unity of Brahman would be no more than an undemonstrable dogma. An escape from the horns of this dilemma is impossible, but the followers of *mūlāvidyā* were undaunted. They made an immediate alliance with the mystics, the followers of Yoga, and boldly affirmed that *avidyā* is destroyed in *nirvikalpa samādhi* or the highest trance. It will be remembered that this root-*avidyā* is held to be present in all the three states (*avasthās*) waking, dream and sleep; only it becomes potential in deep sleep and active as soon as we awake. The persistence of *avidyā* in all the states, therefore, desiderates some other special state in which it may be safely declared to be absent and so these thinkers thought it best to identify the *turiya* of the Upaniṣads with the *samādhi* of the Yogins. Thus all difficulty is solved, *avidyā* is finally seen to be destroyed by *samādhi* and till one attains that condition, it may, with impunity, be held responsible for all plurality.

But this is only an escape from out of the frying pan into the fire. For even so, there is no escape from this dreaded *avidyā*. If a man who gets this trance awakes from it, he does so along with *mūlāvidyā*, which alone can create a world; but if he goes to final *samādhi* never to rise again, there is left no one to testify to the truth of Vedānta.

The last link in this chain of the *mūlāvidyā* argument has got to be mentioned now. We have seen that this undesirable *mūlāvidyā* haunts man throughout his life and shows its

clover hoof even subsequent to the mystic trance. So to avoid its reappearance, the doctrine of '*avidyā-leśa*', a trace of *avidyā*, is pressed into service. It is affirmed that although *mūlāvidyā* is mostly destroyed by *samādhi*, to the teacher who awakes from it is left just a trace of *mūlāvidyā* as would suffice for perception and commerce with the world. From his own view, even this perception is illusory, and when finally he shuffles off the mortal coil he becomes a full-fledged *mukta* or released soul never more to return to this transmigratory life. Should it be still objected that traces or parts of such a principle as *mūlāvidyā* are inconceivable inasmuch as it is not material, there is the *anirvacanīya-vāda*—the doctrine of indescribability ever ready to hand. Parts of *mūlāvidyā* are as indescribable as *mūlāvidyā* itself and so no logical difficulty need worry us.

This in brief is the *mūlāvidyā* theory piously imposed upon the great Śaṅkara. A full account of all the various branches of this scholastic line of thought that are current today is neither possible nor desirable here. Even a brief account of the historical origin and growth of this doctrine, interesting as it would be, cannot be undertaken here. But I hope that sufficient information has been given in this paper to persuade anyone that this teaching is as different from Śaṅkara's as tinsel is from gold. At the very commencement, it assumes the unity of non-dualistic Brahman (with individuals) which has got to be proved, and it explains away the plurality universally perceived by conjuring up the ghost of *mūlāvidyā* from whose clutches final

release is possible only after death.

As I have already stated, it is not altogether hopeless to rescue the genuine doctrine of Advaita taught by Śaṅkara from the obscurity since we have abundant material for this purpose in his great *bhāṣyas*.

My own version of his philosophy as gathered from these sources cannot, as I have already said, be set forth at any great length here. But I have here pointed out the one key which ensures access to Śaṅkara's system which would otherwise be altogether unintelligible. Passages abound in Śaṅkara's *bhāṣyas* where he is never tired of repeating that *adhyāsa* or mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-Self is the only *avidyā* which is in our way of realizing the truth. We are all apt to overemphasize that aspect of the Self where it appears to be actually conscious, where one inevitably transfers the characteristics of the mind to the Self. The Self, however, ever remains in its pristine purity transcending all individuality, personality and plurality in spite of this *avidyā*, for the simple reason that mistaken notions can never affect facts. Śaṅkara therefore appeals to universal experience and, following the great Upaniṣadic seers like Yājñavalkya and Uddālaka, shows that an examination of the three states of consciousness discloses the absolute identity of the witnessing consciousness in each one of us with Brahman or Self. For a detailed account of the method of enquiry he proposes, I beg to refer to his *bhāṣyas* on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*. □

Ignorance is the mother of all the evil and all the misery we see. Let men have light, let them be pure and spiritually strong and educated, then alone will misery cease in the world, not before. We may convert every house in the country into a charity asylum, we may fill the land with hospitals, but the misery of man will still continue to exist until man's character changes.

—Swami Vivekananda

Thy Name is Formless

SRI GURU NANAK

Sri Teja Singh has translated a few āsā metre hymns by Sri Guru Nanak from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the book Āsā dī Vār. We publish two stanzas from it here.

I

By his ego man comes and goes,
is born and dies.
By his ego he gives and receives,
and earns or loses.
By his ego he is true or false,
has considerations
of sin and virtue;
and he descends to hell
or rises to heaven.
By his ego he laughs or weeps,
and begrimes or washes himself.
By his ego he degrades himself
from the human order,
is wise or foolish,
and loses all consciousness
of salvation.
By the ego he is in Maya self-obscured,
and goes into lives
of different creatures.
Man can see the gate of heaven
only if he understands the Self.
Without a proper understanding
he entangles himself
in wordy warfare.
Our Self makes its record
under the supreme Will;
and as we see the one,
we perceive the other.

II

Thy Name is Formless;
by calling upon the Name
man does not go to hell.

Make thy soul and body entirely His,
and share thy food with others;
but by talking about it
thou shalt lose all merit.
Fearless is the Formless One,
whose Name is true, and who
has made the whole world.
His servants are those who worship Him
with the offering of good actions.
Dewy is the night for those
who long in the heart for God.
The disciples have learnt
from the Guru's instruction,
that the beneficent God
saves man through His grace.
Otherwise, Nanak, there is no end
of things that turn round:
Oil-presses, spinning wheels,
handmills, potters' wheels,
whirlwinds of the desert,
many and ceaseless,
tops, skimming-rods, corn-threshers,
birds that go on circling
with a breathless speed,
and insects that are
twirled round on stakes.
If thou wishest well for thyself,
do good and be called lowly.
However mayest thou try
to keep away old age,
it will come in different guises.
No one may tarry
when his measure is full. □

Sufi Parables

HASAN BASRI

Hasan Basri was a great Sufi, and his life and words show his humility.

Hasan Basri says: 'I have been startled by the sayings of four persons: a drunkard, an infamous character, a child, and a woman. One day I saw a drunkard staggering in the midst of the mire. I said to him, "Try and walk so as not to stumble." "O Hasan," the drunkard replied, "in spite of all your efforts, do you walk firmly in the way of God? Tell me, yes or no. If I fall in the mire no great harm is done. I can get rid of it by washing, but if you fall into the pit of self-conceit, you will never emerge clean and your eternal welfare will be entirely ruined." These words pierced me to the heart.

'Again, as I passed once close to a man of infamous character, I drew my robes close about me lest they should touch him. "O Hasan," he said, "why draw thy robes away from contact with me? Only the Most High knows what will be the end of each."

'Another time I saw a child coming towards me holding a lighted torch in his hand. "Where have you brought this light from?" I asked him. He immediately blew it out and said to me, "O Hasan, tell me where it is gone, and I will tell you whence I fetched it."

'One day a good-looking woman, with her face unveiled, came to me. She had just been quarrelling with her husband, and no sooner had she met me than she began reporting his words. "O woman," I said, "first cover thy face and then speak." "O Hasan," she answered, "in my excitement I lost reason, and I did not even know that my face was uncovered. If you had not told me I should have gone thus into the bazar. But you who with so great zeal cultivate the friendship of the Most

High, ought you not to curb your eye, so as not to see whether my face was uncovered or not?" Her words sank deeply into my heart.'

An Arab visiting Hasan Basri asked for a definition of patience. Hasan answered, 'There are two kinds of patience; one kind consists in bearing afflictions and calamities and in abstaining from what the Most High has forbidden, the other kind consists in never lending an ear to the suggestions of the evil one.' 'As for me,' said the Arab, 'I have never seen anyone more retiring from the world and more patient than thyself.' 'Alas,' answered Hasan, 'my renunciation of the world and my patience count as nothing. Because if I practise renouncement it is only from dread of punishment, and if I keep patient it is only because I hope to get my reward. Now that man alone deserves to be taken into account who, without self-regarding motives practises patience for the sake of the Most High, and whose renouncement of the world has not any reward for its object, but only the desire to please God. Such a way of acting is a manifest sign of sincerity of heart.'

Hasan Basri once asked the great Sufi saint Rabi'a if she ever thought of marrying. She answered, 'The marriage contract can be entered into by those who have possession of their free-will. As for me, I have no will to dispose of. I belong to the Lord, and I rest in the shadow of His commandment, counting myself as nothing.' 'But,' asked Hasan, 'how have you arrived at such a degree of piety?' 'By annihilating myself completely.' □

Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā—A Global Perspective

DR S. P. DUBEY

Dr S.P. Dubey is a professor at the department of postgraduate studies and research in philosophy, Rani Durgavati University, Jabalpur. He is popular for his scholarly reviews of terse philosophical books, and his reviews are published from time to time in Prabuddha Bharata. We thank Dr Dubey for this excellent introduction to the Bhagavadgītā. This is a special article on the occasion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, which falls on 12 August.

Ideas in books, howsoever sacred they may be, cannot constitute a culture. They have to be understood and interpreted by each generation and by every conscientious person. Indian culture is alive only when each generation strives to live the philosophical truths of our ṛṣis and saints in its everyday life. How to make spiritual beauty alive and bring its smile and cheer into the world of fears and competitions, conflicts and confusions, joys and sorrows, is the theme of the *Bhagavadgītā* of Vyāsa. It teaches the art of living. It is a scripture which tries to integrate the personality of an individual and make him capable of facing all the challenges of life dynamically. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, it 'is not a weapon for dialectical warfare; it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that region.'¹

There are a number of texts under the title Gītā: *Aṣṭāvakra-gītā*, *Rāma-gītā*, *Gopī-gītā*, *Aṇu-gītā*, etc. The *Bhagavadgītā*, a part of the *Mahābhārata* ('Bhīṣma Parva', chapters 23 to 40), is one of the clearest and most comprehensive

summaries of the perennial philosophy ever to have been made on this globe. It gives us a vision of truth, impressive and profound. It has enduring value not only for Indians but for all mankind. In India it has permeated the collective religious consciousness of the people. In modern India it has been the prime source of inspiration to political and intellectual leaders. With a long history of spiritual power, it serves even today as a light to all who will receive illumination from the profoundness of its wisdom, which insists on a world wider and deeper than wars and revolutions can touch. It is a powerful shaping factor in the renewal of spiritual life and has secured an assured place among the world's greatest



Baby Krishna's image usually worshipped in Hindu homes

scriptures. It is the most popular text of the Hindus. Its doctrines are taken to be the conclusive Hindu position. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (788-820) treats it to be an independent scripture (*śāstra*). It discusses, like any authentic text (*śāstra* or *tantra*), means of knowledge, components, completeness, the statement of uncertainty, decisiveness, enumeration, and the like. It encompasses cosmology, sociology, anthropology, ethics, and so on. It is one of the most valuable treatises on psychology, dealing with great obstacles such as ego, and un-

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Bhagavadgita*, Introduction, p. xv.

attachment to worldly goods.

The *Bhagavadgītā* is treated to be a part of the triple texts (*prasthāna-trayī*; the other two being the Upaniṣads and the *Brahma Sūtras*). Its importance is next only to the Upaniṣads. The text, as found in the commentary of Śaṅkara, is treated to be its earliest authentic form. The Kashmir recension of the text, published in Srinagar, Kashmir, with the annotation of Abhinavagupta, contains 745 verses

whereas the vulgate text has 700 verses (cf. Schrader, O.F., 1930). But that has not been considered the standard version, although there is very little variation between the two. The text contains various principles, suiting to almost all types of human

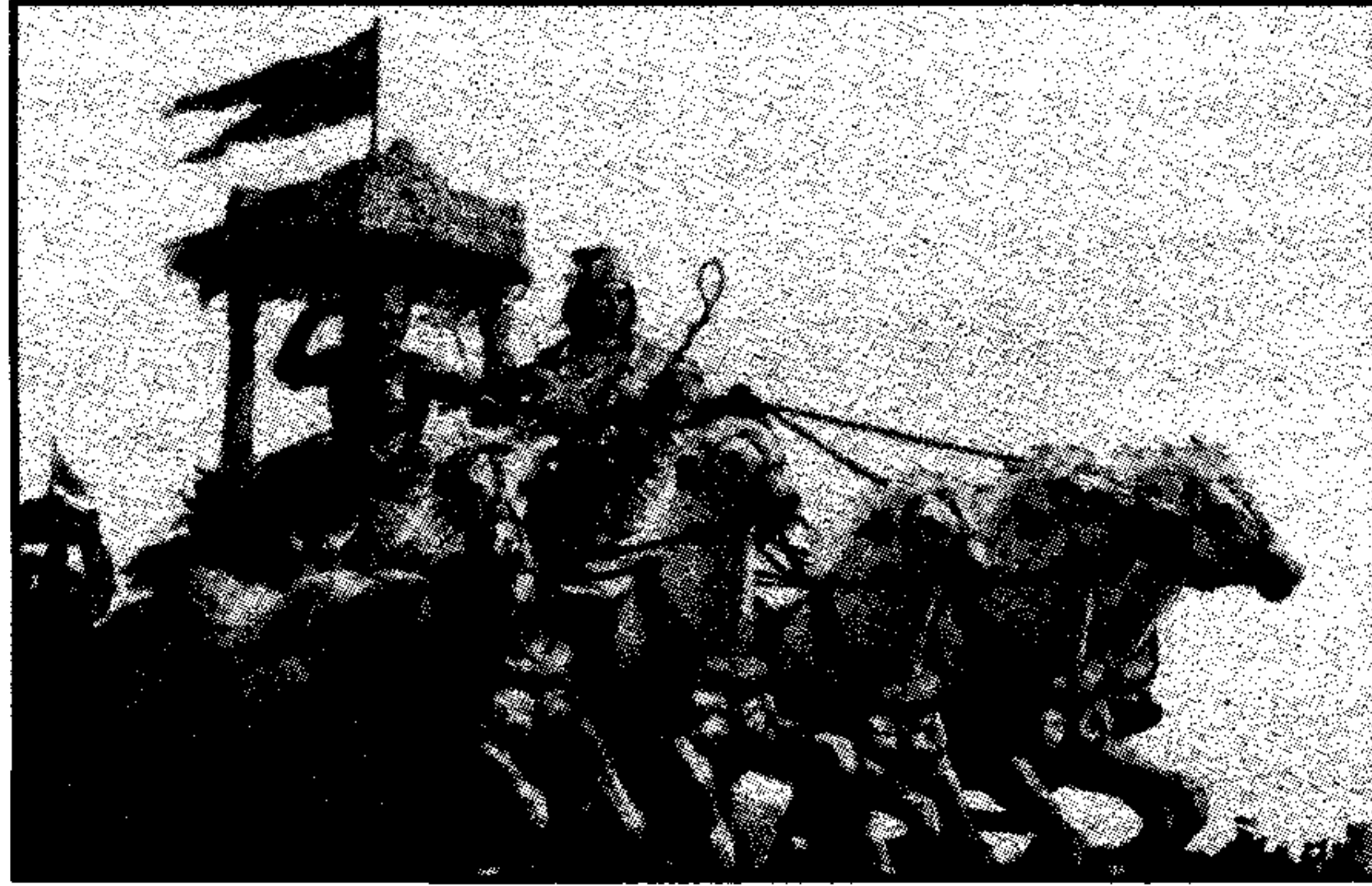
beings. Śaṅkara finds it a great work, propounding the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the only path according to him to lead to Self-realization. According to him, the essential purpose of the *Bhagavadgītā* is to teach us a way out of bondage.² He finds in verse 55 of the eleventh chapter the essence of the text. This verse is treated to be the epitome verse (*carama śloka*) by the Advaitins.

Rāmānuja (11th century) admits that the paths of knowledge, devotion, and action are all mentioned in the *Bhagavadgītā*, but holds that it is a text having profound devotional fervour. For him, verse 66 of the last chapter is the supreme verse. The verse calls upon Ar-

juna to abandon all duties and surrender to the Lord, who will release him from all sins and evils.³

Madhvācārya (1199-1276) contends that devotion is the method emphasized in the *Gītā*. Nimbārka and Vallabha also opine alike and lay clear emphasis on the path of devotion. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (16th century) finds a synthesis of the paths of knowledge, devotion and action in it. He divides the text

into three sections of six chapters each, dealing successfully with karma, bhakti and jñāna yogas. The first, karma yoga, leads to the second, bhakti yoga, and the second to the third, jñāna yoga. Some western scholars find as



The charioteer Krishna teaching the Bhagavadgita to Arjuna

many as nine tracts in the present form of the *Song Divine*. It has been rightly said in the context that the sages have described in various ways the essential truths (*nānā prasamkhyānam tattvānām kavibhiḥ kṛtam*). But Madhusūdana finds the unity of the major tracts in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Franklin Edgerton also advocates the unity of the text and so does Belvalkar.

If one wishes to illuminate the richness and complexity of the *Gītā*, it is not enough to discuss its ideas or look at one or two commentaries but one needs to explore a number of different, yet complementary approaches. Historical, exegetical, theological and comparative methods of study are required to develop a much-needed, differentiated hermeneutics for explaining the meaning and assessing its contribution to our global heritage.

The universal message of the *Bha-*

2. *Śoka-mohādi-samsāra-karma-nivṛty-artham-gītā śāstram*.

3. *Sarva dharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇam vraja*. (18.66)

gavadgītā is said to be the realization of the oneness of man with the ultimate Reality ('*tat-tvamasi*', *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, 6.8.7). It has been held that the first six chapters of the text deal with *tvam* (the person); the next six chapters deal with the nature of *tat* (the Absolute); and the last six chapters relate to *asi* or the non-difference between the two.⁴ As salt is bound to dissolve in water, since it comes from the ocean, likewise, the self is dissolved in the Self. We realize that we really are the Ātman or Divinity with an outer sheath, the body, and inside it is the subtle body consisting of the mind and the intellect. Although the *Gītā* refers particularly to the battlefield of Kurukshetra where the Pāṇḍavas fought for the sake of truth and peace after receiving the lesson of duty, its teachings apply to the whole mankind, being the gospel of truth, tranquillity, spirituality and humanity.

The book has been translated into all the widely spoken languages of India as also into the principal languages of the world. As early as the time of Akbar (1556-1605) it was translated into Persian separately by Abu'l-Fazl and Faizi. Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59) was enamoured by the *Gītā* and found its teachings having a universal approach and, therefore, got it translated afresh into Persian.⁵ It is, thus, obvious that a few scholars of the outer world during medieval centuries became aware of the teachings of the text. It has, of course, exercised influence on China and Japan in early centuries. The two chief works of Mahāyāna Buddhism, *Mahāyānaśraddhotpatti* ('The Awakening of Faith') and *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* ('The Lotus of the True Law')⁶ are deeply indebted to the teachings of the *Gītā*.

The *Gītā* has become more popular in the world over the last two hundred years or so

after its English translation in 1785 by Charles Wilkins (London) who compared it with the *New Testament*, especially the Gospel of St John. Wilkins' translation did not become as popular as the much more poetic rendering of Sir Edwin Arnold, entitled *Song Celestial* (published in 1885). These translations help *Gītā* occupy the exalted position the Bible holds in the West. Franklin Edgerton calls it 'India's favourite Bible.' In reading the 'marvellous words' of the *Gītā*, Simone Weil finds a 'Christian sound, put into the mouth of an incarnation of God.' It has won the interest of the West and finds expression in the writings of von Humboldt in Germany and Emerson in America. The official exponent of 'the German Faith', J.W. Hauer, gives to the *Gītā* a central place in the German faith. He calls it 'a work of imperishable significance' and declares that the book 'gives us not only profound insights that are valid for all times and for all religious life, but it contains as well the classical presentation of one of the most significant phases of Indo-German religious history.' According to him the central message of the text is 'to find out the Deed demanded of us and to work and so, by action, to master the riddle of life.' It has influenced the minds of contemporary Russians as well. A large number of research papers were submitted by Soviet scholars on the *Bhagavadgītā*, mostly as understood by Swami Vivekananda, during the XIX World Philosophy Congress held at Moscow in August, 1993.

The theophany, depicted in Chapter Eleven of the text, attracted Christian theologians. German scholar Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) treats it to be one of the best examples of *mysterium tremendum* ('tremendous mystery'). The scene is an excellent blending of the rational and the non-rational elements in the religious experience consisting of a sense of creature-feeling, otherness, fascination, etc. The highest form of God was shown here to Arjuna by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, not accessible to mortals. Otto notes that closely analogous to this God-vision is a previous section in the epic (6.131),

4. Cf. P.V. Nath, *Tattvamasi: The Universal Message in the Bhagavadgita* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998).

5. Manuscript in India Office Library, London.

6. Edited by Bhikkhu Jagadish Kashyap (Nalanda, 1961).

which reveals the supernatural form of the Divine when Kṛṣṇa goes to the camp of Duryodhana as a messenger. But in the later form the dreadful appearance (*ghora rūpa*) has been turned into *viśva-rūpa* (pantheistic apparition). The chapter reaches its climax in verse 33 when the Lord says: 'Be thou naught but my tool.' These words according to Otto, should be called the *carama śloka* of the text (Śaṅkara calls it the sum and epitome of the whole *Gītā*). The able disciple of Richard Garbe, interestingly, believes that the doctrinal treatises are interpolated in the text at later stages. In this he is in agreement with Hermann Jacobi, who also holds that the original nucleus of the *Gītā* was elaborated by the scholiasts into its present form. Holtzmann looks upon the *Gītā* as a Viṣṇuite remodelling of a pantheistic poem.

In the earlier chapter of the *Gītā*, called 'Vibhūti Yoga', the Lord utters the supreme Word (*paramam vacaḥ*, 10.1) of the text. Here he tells Arjuna that the Godhead is one in all things that are, the self who lives in all and the self in whom all live and move; therefore man has to discover his spiritual unity with all creatures, to see all in the self and the self in all beings, even to see all things and creatures as himself. As there is no end to the details of the self-extension of the Lord in the universe, he tells Arjuna that he is the self that abides in the heart of all beings, is Viṣṇu among the Ādityas, Sāma among the Vedas, Śiva among the Rudras, Brhaspati among the high priests, Himalayas among the immovables, the Aśvattha among the plants, Nārada among the divine seers, spiritual knowledge (*adhyātma vidyā*) among the different branches of knowledge, the letter 'a' among letters, the silence of things secret and so on. In fact whatever is glorious, beautiful or mighty and forceful, that verily is born from a fragment of the Lord's splendour. Towards the end of the chapter he tells Arjuna that he need not know the details. It is sufficient to know that the Lord supports this entire universe with an infinitesimal portion of his.

By the late 1880s a new interest began to

emerge in the country with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's first modern, yet unfinished *Gītā* commentary in Bengali. Bankim gave to the *Gītā* a new sense of a 'gospel of duty'. His was soon followed by other commentaries by reformers and nationalists. They differed in what they considered to be the essential message of the *Gītā* but in contrast to the quietistic interpretation of the past, which focused on meditation and devotion, they all emphasized karma yoga.

The theory of *niṣkāma karma* of the *Gītā* has been compared with the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant. The other important theory of *svadharma* has been compared with 'man's station and his duty' propounded by the British idealist F.H. Bradley. The principle of yoga as wisdom in work (*karmasu kauśalam*) is a great impetus for the modern technological society. The other definition of yoga as tranquillity (*śamatva*) provides psycho-physical aids to the sick man of today.

The Hindu reformers, as noted above, have emphasized the karma theory of the *Gītā* and underline its activist orientation rather than quietistic interpretation. Sri Aurobindo, in 1909-10, consciously chose the scene of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra for the title page of his journal *Karmayogin*. Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna to engage in active battle. Subsequently, Arjuna's sorrow, doubt and fear are overcome and he fights and also wins the race. Pārthasārathi or Gītācārya provides solace to everybody, if he or she comes to him:

*Ye yathā mām prapadyante
tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham;
Mama vartmānuvartante
manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ. (4.11)*

In whatever manner men worship me, in that very way do I hail them, for all men follow my path.

*Yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktaḥ
śraddhayārcitumicchati;
Tasya tasyācalām śraddhām
tāmeva vidadhāmyaham. (7.21)*

Whatever form of me any devotee with

faith desires to worship, I make that faith of his firm and undeviating.

The famous statement of the text about the learned one treating a brahmin and an outcast, nay, even animals as equals⁷ is an example of universal fraternity.

The Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* is very attractive because he is both human and divine. Here is a God who speaks to man and leads him in his actions, even if this meant aggressive action. The dialogue situation is also of great importance for it shows that in the midst of battle Kṛṣṇa is close to human concerns; he is not an abstract God. The visual representation of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the chariot reinforces the double sense in which the *Gītā* has been understood in modern times—on the one hand it has been interpreted as a dialogue about things divine (God, soul and salvation), on the other hand it has been, for countless people, a handbook of practical wisdom, to live and act in the world, understood as a battlefield on

which we have to perform our duty.

As exclusive students of the secular scriptures, today's politicians, economists and scientists, all over the world, in their extrovert considerations, come to the conclusion that individuals are saved when the world has improved. By developing the untapped wealth of a nation through a planned economy, and by applying the revealed knowledge of science, materialism strives to raise the 'standard of living' of the people. When the modern world with its materialistic viewpoint is trying hard to bring about a higher standard of living by improving the world around man, thinkers of religious scriptures and the rational philosophers indicate that the happiness and glory of the world depend upon the standard of life that the individual comes to live. The *Bhagavadgītā* not only indicates theories of the Hindu way of life but reveals certain definite schemes by which every individual can work out his own self-improvement. The concepts of *lokasaṁgraha*, *sthitaprajña* (*yudhi-sthira*) and *puruṣottama* are suggestive of such schemes. □

7. *Vidyāvinayaśaṁpanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini; Śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ.*

Japa and its Efficacy

Some kind of excuse will always be found by those who do not perform japa, yet if one will make a practice of repeating the holy Name, the Name itself will take hold of the mind.

Of a surety the mind is restless, drunk with worldly attachment, and it is this attachment that drags it down. This is why Sri Krishna taught Arjuna non-attachment to objects and actions, and why he taught him the practice of devotion.

Through the regular practice of japa the mind will gradually become tranquil. Practise discrimination, and whenever the mind runs after sense-objects, discriminate between the Real and the unreal. Know every sense-object to be transitory; today it is, tomorrow it is not.

Impress these thoughts again and again upon the mind, and as the mind receives the impressions, true discrimination will arise.

It is also true that the power of the Name works even while one sleeps. He who practises japa continues to repeat the Name in all states of consciousness.

—Swami Adbhutananda

Swami Vivekananda on Karma Yoga

SWAMI TYAGARUPANANDA

Swami Tyagarupanandaji is a young monk of the Ramakrishna Order, serving as the Vice-Principal of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math. Apart from expertise in economics, Tyagarupanandaji has been studying Swami Vivekananda deeply. His ideas on Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on karma yoga of the Bhagavadgita are presented here.

Swami Vivekananda's lectures from Colombo to Almora have heralded a new era in the religious history of India. Through these lectures, Swamiji spread our ancient message, spoke about the glory of the Upanishads, and revived the doctrine of karma yoga.

Karma yoga was to Swamiji the panacea for the evil of *tamas* which had enshrouded the country. This sublime yoga was narrated by the Lord in the *Bhagavadgita*. In the course of time, this great yoga had fallen into oblivion, and Swamiji re-delivered it.

The central idea of karma yoga is non-attachment: not to desire for the fruits of our actions in any form. We must work incessantly, but there must shine the idea of non-agentship. We cannot be karma yogis if we are grossly attached to the fruits of our actions. Karma yoga thus teaches us the science of work. We must work scientifically. The aim of all work is to bring out the hidden powers of the mind. The result of work done with a restless and distracted mind is dissipation of energy. So karma yoga teaches us how to stop frittering away our energies.

The *Bhagavadgita* says that good and evil are concomitant to every work. These opposites bind the soul to the action-result chain. The inexorable law of karma demands results for all actions. Results in their turn bind the soul. What is the way out of this nexus? The solution reached in the Gita in regard to this bondage-producing nature of work is that, if we do not attach ourselves to the work we do, it will not have any binding effect on our soul.¹ Just as a 'tortoise tucks its feet and head

inside the shell,' and though you 'may kill it and break it in pieces, and yet it will not come out, even so the character of that man who has control over his motives and organs is unchangeably established.'² The man who desires for liberation goes above the dualities of good and bad—he knows that the golden chain of good actions binds even as the iron chain of evil ones does. The key to achieve the blessed state of equanimity, peace, and calmness is to work 'as if you were a stranger in this land, a sojourner.'³

The whole of this exercise of life is meant for the training of the soul. It is with this perspective that we must view the panorama of life, and not as something to be possessed by pushing others overboard. Infinitely greater is the grandeur of the soul as compared to the workings of nature. Once we realize this, the entire nature appears as a machinery, only to be watched with sublime detachment. We ought to work as masters of *prakriti* and not as slaves.

Desire can only be conquered by unselfishness and love. Karma yoga harps on continuous action—to be done through love. Love makes the road of work smooth; and yet this love must be tuned to the highest, the Lord of the universe. 'The heart's love is due to only One. To whom? To Him who never changeth.

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 53. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]
2. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 55.
3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 56.

... The Lord is the only One who never changes. His love never fails.⁴ One may also choose the path of knowledge and assert his real Self. We are *nitya-suddha-buddha-mukta*, eternally pure, awakened and free. No action can bind us. All actions that we perform are but the working of *prakriti*. So let her go on as she wishes. We shall remain witnesses to all actions. Thus no results of actions can bind us.

Such a standpoint, however, befits only the highest type of aspirants who have already reached the acme of spiritual practices. So long as the least trace of impurity remains, selfishness creeps in. Therefore, we should select the second path: we have to submit all our actions to the Supreme since the Lord has pledged that he will take care of his devotees. This method is undoubtedly suited for the vast majority of people. Reliance on an all-powerful Being, supremely compassionate and ready to take us across the turbulent sea of life, is an easy and amiable method for many.

Karma yoga is put into practice through self-sacrifice. We eat to nourish our bodies, and our physical bodies are sacrifices in the great fire of service of humanity. 'For the whole world is one; you are rated a very insignificant part of it, and therefore it is right for you that you should serve your millions of brothers rather than aggrandise this little self.'⁵ It is sacrifice which distinguishes animals from human beings. As Swami Vivekananda elaborated in a talk with his disciple, the theories of the 'survival of the fittest' and 'struggle for existence' apply more to the animals where 'instinct prevails; but the more a man advances, the more he manifests rationality.'⁶

Let's look at the philosophical side of the question. Two issues come up. How is the doctrine of Purva Mimamsa, which encourages action, different from karma yoga? Secondly, Acharya Sankara has harped on the

antagonism between knowledge and work. How then do we justify the performance of unselfish works as aids to spiritual practice?

All the scriptures insist on work being a preparatory stage to the pursuit of the path of knowledge. Good works remove the obstacles to the realization of the Atman. 'But work has no power in directly manifesting the Atman; it is only effective in removing some veils that cover knowledge. Then the Atman manifests by its own effulgence.'⁷ The causal chain would not work in the attainment of the Atman, as it is beyond cause and effect. Swamiji mentioned that the philosophy of unselfish work had been propounded in the *Bhagavadgita* to combat the 'Purva-Mimamsa doctrine of work with motive-producing results.'⁸ The *Gita*, moreover, throws open the gates of karma yoga to all kinds of works. All actions, done as offerings to the universal sacrifice, is karma yoga. Alternatively, any work done with due devotion and with its fruits submitted to the Lord gets transformed into karma yoga.

But why should one take pains to do works for whose fruits he can lay no claim? After struggling for years, the karma yogi finds that works with desires do not provide happiness and lead interminably to more rounds of births and deaths. Whatever speck of happiness is perceived goes hand in hand with the fruits of work. So long as the body remains, work must continue in one form or another. Unselfish works serve to shatter the bonds of ignorance and lead one to God-realization. The performers of such works are the karma yogins.

Swamiji, moreover, extended the field of karma yoga and gave it a form suitable to the present age. Firstly, service by monks of the afflicted in society was a novelty. Monks were traditionally supposed to lie beyond the pale of society. Swami Vivekananda extended their domain of work to nursing of the sick, scav-

4. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 128-9.

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 446.

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 154.

7. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 178.

8. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 179.

enging of streets and famine relief in addition to more traditional works such as preaching and the like. Secondly, karma yoga itself was set on a firmer footing with greater respect (*shraddha*) for the receiver of the benefits of work. The man who receives is God Himself, for isn't the Almighty manifested everywhere? In a Sanskrit letter to his disciple, Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, Swamiji elaborated this lofty conception of service: '...Jiva and Ishvara are in essence the same, serving the Jivas and loving God must mean one and the same thing. ... When you serve a Jiva with the idea that he is a Jiva, it is Daya (compassion) and not Prema (love); but when you serve him with the idea that he is the Self, that is Prema. ... Ours is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of Self in all.'⁹

The karma yogi must have a heart as broad as the ocean, able to embrace everyone with outstretched arms. And yet the sword of discrimination must always be ready, lest he mistakes mere emotionalism as love, the snares and temptations of the world for real compassion. The mighty karma yogi must thus be a jnani, bhakta, karmi, all rolled into one. As Swamiji said: '...but without spiritual practices you will never be able to do this Karma-yoga. You must harmonize the four different Yogas; otherwise, how can you always keep your mind and heart wholly on the Lord?'¹⁰

Arjuna was the greatest hero, but at the battlefield, his heart sank. He surrendered to Krishna, and the result is the *Gita*. 'Partha, this imbecility is unbecoming of you,' signalled Krishna's admonition to Arjuna.

'For all of us in this world life is a continuous fight. ... Many a time comes when we

want to interpret our weakness and cowardice as forgiveness and renunciation. There is no merit in the renunciation of a beggar.'¹¹ 'Knowing this, stand up and fight! Not one step back, that is the idea. ... Fight it out, whatever comes. Let the stars move from the sphere! Let the whole world stand against us! Death means only a change of garment. What of it?'¹² The weak have no place in this world, it is ruled by the strong.

Swami Vivekananda spread the gospel of strength from one end of the globe to another. Strength is the only cure for all the weaknesses of the world, he felt. One remembers Swamiji's clarion call at the Parliament of Religions: "'Children of immortal bliss" —what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal....'¹³

Swami Vivekananda continuously advocated the study of the *Bhagavadgita* for everyone. 'Please read the Gita every day to the best of your opportunity.'¹⁴ Both in the East and the West he spoke of the *Gita* and established it as a scripture of eminence. Just as Sri Krishna had spoken to Arjuna to give up unmanliness and plunge into the battle, so did Swamiji raise the sleeping leviathan of Indian consciousness to the new age, to the new times, when India will again occupy her glorious position in the history of the world. □

9. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 133.

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 274.

11. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 459.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 461.

13. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

14. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 247.

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Maharaj, why is innocence regarded as foolishness?

Innocence is a merit, a quality, whereas foolishness is a demerit, a weakness. This being the case, how can these two be synonymous? Why do you ask something when you know the answer?

What is falsehood?

What is not truth is falsehood! All that appears before us can be perceived by the sense-organs. The sense-organs are transitory, and what is impermanent cannot be the truth.

Maharaj, unless we have a noble lineage or pedigree to back us, we cannot establish ourselves in life. Is not Karna of the Mahābhārata a glaring example of this?

Not true. Sage Nārada was born in a maidservant's house. Was Nārada in any way inferior on account of that? When they called him a charioteer's son, *sūta putra*, in the overflowing assembly hall of the Kauravas, Karna replied: 'Where I was born, whether in a charioteer's family or elsewhere, is not under my control. What is under my control is my valour.'

Why has it been said that a holy man has to be observed during the day and during the night?

Observe a holy man always. You are asked to discriminate. Wicked people also can come in the guise of holy men. Rāvaṇa came

in a holy man's robes and carried Sītā away. He is a holy man by being in the proximity of whom a person's spiritual moods are awakened. God is purity itself; the devotee thinks of him always. And by thinking so, he becomes similarly pure.

Gāndhārī knew that her sons were wrong, did she not?

In spite of that, whichever mother wants her children to die? Just because they have wronged does not mean they should die.

If Kṛṣṇa is God Himself, why did Gāndhārī's curse affect him?

Śrī Kṛṣṇa had assumed a human body and so he had to experience the sweet-and-bitter fruits of this world as others did.

What is the meaning of the word *nairvyaktika*?

Nairvyaktika means that which is applicable to everyone. That it is not related to any special individual. You may translate it as 'impersonal'.

Why did Gāndhārī curse Kṛṣṇa?

Why should she not? (With a laugh) Śrī Kṛṣṇa had done a lot of mischief, you see. It was because of Kṛṣṇa that Gāndhārī lost all her sons.

Astrologers say that everything is predestined. Is this true, Maharaj?

Nobody says that. People tease astrologers and therefore comment in this way. Of course, some astrologers say that either this or that could happen. They say, perform a certain sacrifice and you will not die. But can you become immortal?

Looking at things from God's point of view, everything is pre-destined; but you are not seeing from that angle. All the time you are thinking that by doing this we shall get this, by doing that we shall get that. Regarding work or karma you have an independent line of thought.

Is there any relationship between science and religion?

Religion deals with those things which are beyond the sense-organs. Science deals with those things which can be grasped by the five senses.

Why does science not believe in the scriptures?

Science is *pratyakṣavādi*, perception-dependent. So it does not believe in the scriptures. Science will not accept that which cannot be tested by perception. As I said, the foundation of science is laid on perception while that of dharma is not. Science will not accept that which is beyond the pale of the five senses. Religion is a science of non-perception, that is, it cannot be grasped by the five senses. The subject of science is something beyond. So science will not accept religion. The fields of science and religion are different.

We cannot see the atom and the sub-atomic particles with the naked eye. But why then does science accept them?

The atom is not perceived by the senses, but it is accepted as the cause. There was book

by name *Thinkers and Believers* some time ago. In that book many big scientists have been questioned and their opinions gathered. Many have said there that we do not believe in religion, but some others have said that they cannot say they are non-believers, at the same time they are not believers. The cornerstones of science are observation, demonstration, etc. Observe first, then demonstrate: this is the idea.

Sri Ramakrishna had seen God, then?

Yes, Sri Ramakrishna had seen God. But his saying this will not do. Everyone must be able to perceive God. Science is for everybody's perception. Someone told Sri Ramakrishna, 'Please show me God'. Sri Ramakrishna replied that the person has not at all begun his journey along that path but wants to see God. The subtle truths of religion cannot be demonstrated before the ordinary run. Science can at best go up to the mind. But it cannot go further. After this stage comes the stage of philosophy. Philosophy also is based on science. As I said, while science is perceived by the five senses, philosophy is based on the intellect and so that goes beyond the five senses. About all this, Sir James Jeans has written much in *Popular Science* and other books. Other scientists have opposed him and said that he has gone beyond the borders of science. Max Planck and Einstein have discussed him in one place. While Planck has said: 'It is nonsense,' Einstein has added that it is 'objectionable nonsense.'

Scientists have drawn a circle around themselves and they will not go beyond that. For instance, 'We shall research but shall not write.'

—compiled by *Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar*

Do your duty for God's sake; know that all belongs to God, and you will reach freedom and wisdom in time. This is karma yoga.

—*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

Religion in Mainland China Today

DR ALAN HUNTER

Dr Alan Hunter is a specialist in Chinese Studies and Religious Studies. He has worked for many years in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore. He was Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Leeds, UK, till 1998. His recent book is Contemporary China (Macmillan, 1999). Hope you have read his beautiful series on 'Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta' published in our journal between November 1999 and April 2000. Please read this wonderful article about the present status of religion in China.

Despite several decades of religious oppression by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), religions have experienced a phenomenal growth in mainland China especially since the mid-1980s. Currently, various forms of religions, particularly the traditional folk religions, can be seen all over mainland China; the coastal provinces such as Fukien (Fujian) and Chekiang (Zhejiang) seem to enjoy the fastest growth. The reappearance of religions becomes a major social force, increasingly catching the attention of both the Communist government and the academics. Focusing on Fukien and Chekiang provinces, we suggest a new paradigm to look at religion in Chinese society, trace the historical development of several major religions from the beginning of this century till recent times, summarize the current status of these major religions, and analyse the social and political impacts of these religions on mainland Chinese society.

Years ago, scholarly works about Chinese religious life used to bear titles such as 'The Three Religions of China'. They stated that there were three main religions in traditional China, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and that a person might subscribe to any of them. More recent studies developed other

perspectives. Most important, and mainly after ethnographic research in Taiwan, scholars increasingly used the term 'folk religion', which covers a wider territory and is more realistic. It was also noted that many Chinese followed two or more 'religions' at the same time; Protestant Christianity has made a remarkable impact since the nineteenth century; religious institutions have changed radically under pressure of ideological challenges, a repressive government, and, recently, an influx of wealth. However, most debate within mainland China itself since 1949 has been couched in simplistic Marxist terminology, and the primary motive of academic work there has been to provide justification for gov-



The fifth Dalai Lama travelled to Peking (Beijing), China, in 1653 and met the Chinese emperor (from a painting)

ernment policy. Outside mainland China, studies have been seriously hindered by lack of data, since mainland China was almost completely closed to non-Chinese researchers until very recently. Some excellent work, mostly by anthropologists, has been conducted in Taiwan and Hong Kong, but these territories have of course not experienced the dramatic impact of anti-religious policies.

This paper offers a brief overview of religion in Fukien (Fujian) and Chekiang (Zhejiang). We suggest that studies of religion in China should take into account, more than they have in the past, at least two further elements: the impact of social changes, and the growth of Protestantism. The geographical area is deliberately limited to two provinces; the pattern of beliefs and practices may well be different elsewhere in mainland China. Likewise, the time-scale is limited to this century, and the objective is to clarify the present situation, in the early 1990s. This paper is only introductory, and the topics demand much further elucidation.

We adopt a rather broad concept of religion, inclusive rather than exclusive, but do not propose to add to the numerous learned articles that have attempted to define the meaning of the term. However, it is worth noting that

until very recently the late nineteenth century European analyses of religion—namely those of Durkheim, Marx, and Morgan, which in turn derived from Christian thought—were by far the best understood and the most used even in China, not to mention in western academia. This approach to religion tends to attach an overwhelming importance to personal belief, doctrinal statements, and institutions, and tends to consider religion as a measurable package, with a monolithic identity. Scholars affiliated to churches (and many of the most important students of Chinese religion were Christian missionaries) naturally felt comfortable within this paradigm. At the other extreme, Marxist critics of religion also accepted it with little reservation, finding it a useful tool for policy decisions and propaganda: for example, distinguishing between 'religion' (which could be tolerated) and 'superstition' (which could not); or asserting the capitalist orientation of Christian ideology and the imperialist nature of church institutions. It is ironic that hard-line Marxist analysis of religion in fact uses terms of reference inherited from Christian dogma, and this is even translated into Chinese government policy, for example, defining a religion as legitimate only when it has certain specific characteristics: a written history, a scriptural canon, an organization, a set of doctrines, and a defined code of practice.

A more appropriate model within which to discuss most of China's religious practices is that of 'Asiatic mode of religion', which does not stress belief or intellectual assent as the central element of religious commitment. Rather, religion is part of culture and the cycles of daily life. Social and personal life in many Asian communities is imbued with a range of ritual practices that permeate one's relationships, whether with strangers,



In 1959, after the fall of Tibet to China, Tibetan monks tried to save themselves by taking to arms. They failed, and were forced to surrender their weapons

friends, officialdom, or family. One performs rituals in a constant cycle of repetition, some with the aid of specialists, others by oneself. In the case of religion, the primary role of the specialist is to guarantee the efficacy of the ritual, not to inculcate a particular belief; the role of the lay practitioner is to perform the ritual, not to cultivate a particular intellectual orientation. Action is primary; rationalization far less important; orthopraxies rather than orthodoxy. The role of a scripture is as ritual tool rather than teaching text, revelation, or philosophy. Efficacy takes precedence over reflection, and where doctrine is taught to lay people, it is generally a simple moral teaching, equally accepted by all religions. The complexities of metaphysical argument are reserved for a very few monks in the major centres of Buddhism, and for the handful of intellectuals who wish to engage with the religious world. Colloquial Chinese expresses the difference accurately: to inquire about religious affiliation, one should ask *'Ni pai nei-ke shen?'* (Which god are you worshipping?), not *'Ni hsin shen-mo?'* (What do you believe in?). In south China, most practices are referred to simply as *'pai shen'* (worshipping gods), with no differentiation between different deities or beliefs. Recently converted Christians in rural areas may refer to Sunday worship, especially conducted at home, in this way.

We shall discuss six major strands here: religion in the home; various manifestations of Chinese popular religion; community religion, cults, and sects; the role of Taoism and of Buddhism; Protestantism and, finally, the role of the newcomer, Falungong. Chinese religious culture displays a rich variety, and still other religions exist in the region (Islam and Catholicism to name but two), but they are

relatively insignificant. Those familiar with religious studies in China will not be surprised to learn that statistical and other quantitative information is extremely sketchy. We only hint at the impact of social developments on religion, but we believe this will be a promising area of study.

Religion in the Home

Few scholars, whether Chinese or western, have reported in detail on religious practices in Chinese households in southeast China. Fortunately, in the late 1920s the missionary educator Clarence Burton Day, to the surprise of his students and colleagues in Hangchow (Hangzhou), amassed much information and many religious artifacts from the villages of northern Chekiang in particular. According to Day, religion in the homes of Chekiang had two central elements: propitiation of ancestors, and sacrifice to gods. Much of the outward ceremonial was similar in both cases, as were the indispensable items of equipment: food and drink, candles, incense, paper money, and firecrackers.

These items—still used in pilgrimages, temple worship, and community festivals—are as central to Chinese religion as are the 'bell, book, and candle' to Christianity. They are laid out on a table to honour the spirit, who must be attracted by the sweet aroma of the food and the light of the candle. Incense is burnt daily as food for the soul, and effecting the descent of the spirits. The spirit returns to his (usually not her) abode, receiving paper money burned as a gift, and the ceremony is followed by noisy firecrackers, which are set off to chase away evil spirits.

Such ritual worship was most widespread at the Lunar New Year, and for the honour of ancestors. Clarence Burton Day reports on a New Year's Eve sacrifice in



Title page of an old Chinese book on the Bodhisattva ideal

Chekiang to which he was invited. A cardboard portrait of the Kitchen God had been set on a niche in the kitchen. Many kinds of wine, rice, cakes, and fruit were laid out in front of the god, lit by red candles; paper money was made ready for his travel expenses. Meanwhile, a sumptuous feast had been prepared in another room for an assortment of gods: the Buddha, Kuan-yin, and local and Taoist deities. Throughout the evening, the head of the household unfolded charts with names and pictures of other gods, so all received their due share of reverence. At midnight, members of the family made obeisance to all the gods, and then shared their feast; at dawn, paper replicas of the gods and paper money were burned to the accompaniment of firecrackers.¹

New Year is the time of the greatest sacrifice and worship, but similar scenes could be observed on countless occasions throughout the year, especially when sacrifices were made to deceased ancestors. Religious activities were part of a rather structured annual rhythm, based on the lunar calendar, an integrated part of rural life. One of Day's informants wrote: 'As far as we know in the district of Yuyao almost every family possesses many pictures of its ancestors. ... During the first day of the New Year, the people hang these pictures on their walls. On a table before each picture are placed many kinds of cakes, fruits, etc. The eldest of each family burns the incense and the younger members kneel down before the pictures every morning and evening. The souls of the ancestors are supposed to descend on the smoke of the burning incense. The pictures are taken down on the 18th of the first month.'²

How widespread were, and are, such practices? It is impossible to give an accurate answer to the question. According to Day, people in Hangchow city 'are more or less

convinced that it is useless to bow down before wooden idols or paper gods as their forefathers did twenty years ago. Nevertheless, there still remains an overwhelming proportion of village folk who keep the old tradition by worshipping at least a few outstanding gods at the New Year time.'³ The rituals of worship in the home, primarily by incense and food offering, have probably been part of Chinese culture for thousands of years. They are still alive in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and, although banned from mainland China for the past forty years, are now making a comeback there, influenced by all three religions. It is the authentic expression of the indigenous religion of China, a religion that has no formal name. It is noteworthy that the mainland Chinese government has until now refused to recognize the legitimacy of popular religious practice, although much of it is de facto permitted, and it is officially considered superstition, hence to be discouraged.

Community Religion, Cults, and Sects

Community-based religious activity bears many resemblances to religion in the home: the ritual items and practices are quite similar; the activity draws in similar strata of the population; it is condemned by so-called progressive ideology; it tends to affirm orthopraxies rather than doctrine. Some activities are shared by members of a locality, others by members of a cult, who may make pilgrimages from several hundred miles away, others by a sect, which may be national or even international. The organizations known as *miao-t'uan* (temple associations) may be considered a halfway stage between the non-institutionalized folk religion and the more formal religious structures of Buddhism or Taoism.

Paintings of Taoist and other gods are hung in a temple, in front of which are erected altars and tables with incense burners, sacrifices, and other ritual instruments. Meanwhile, almost everyone in the community has helped in preparing for and contributing to

1. Clarence Burton Day, *Chinese Peasant Cults* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1940), pp. 15-8. [Hereafter, *Peasant Cults*.]

2. *Peasant Cults*, p. 103.

3. *Peasant Cults*, p. 87.

the festival: cleaning up the neighbourhood, repairing buildings and perhaps even roads and bridges, contributing to a prodigious feast, and organizing ritual theatre, dances, and martial arts displays. Often a statue of the god is carried in a chair around the perimeter of the territory that claims him.⁴ A Taoist priest conducts a highly elaborate ceremony, which has as its external aspect, sacrifice and liturgy, and, as its internal aspect, meditation and alchemy. Gods worshipped in a given community were numerous: they might include earth-gods, gods of city walls (the popular *ch'eng-huang*), gods of the territory (*t'u-ti-kung*), and gods of fire, disease, water, thunder, and much else. They would be honoured every year on their birthday; particularly grandiose celebrations would be held perhaps once in twelve years, obviously linked to community cohesion and renewal.

Temple cults are a step removed from these territory-specific activities, since they attracted devotees from other cities, even other provinces. Kenneth Dean's recent work provides three well-documented case studies of such cults from contemporary Fukien. One of them, the 'Patriarch of the Clear Stream', is a deified Buddhist monk who has gained devotees across Fukien and as far afield as the Philippines and Singapore. The celebration of his birthday was the major cultural and religious event of the year in the region, and overcame divisions between clan, locality, and lineage: early in the century, up to thirty thousand people joined in huge processions to his temple. Despite major political problems with the authorities, local villagers, with support of overseas Chinese, managed to revive the cult in public in the late 1980s, when evocative scenes were seen: 'The instalment of the god in the central altar was very solemn. Eight paper palaces for the gods lined the doorway.

In the courtyard were five freshly slaughtered pigs. Before the altar stood three five-foot sticks of incense. ... The sides of the altar were decorated with cones of peanuts and candles fashioned so as to spell out the name of the god. ... Finally the Taoist was persuaded to put on his robe and perform a brief service.'⁵ The most important such cults in southeast China are the immensely popular Matsu and Huang Ta-hsien (Wong Tai Sin in Cantonese).

Finally, in the same social territory are the religious sects, which have a negative reputation because of the publicity given to secret societies such as the Triads. Criminal organizations are a problem in south China, but that fact should not blind us to the existence of numerous sects that are essentially religious in nature, probably the largest being the I-kuan-tao. Illegal in the People's Republic (with believers arrested, for example, in Huiyang City in December 1993) and also in Taiwan until recently, such sects have frequently been accused of criminality or subversion. In reality, many millions of Chinese belong to these religious societies, which are perfectly respectable and even highly moralistic in orientation. They typically worship gods from the Buddhist and Taoist pantheons, venerate divination and mediumship, have mutual aid networks and social welfare programmes, and generally perform the functions of a congregational religion somewhat in the manner of Protestantism, although their ideology and cultural heritage are very different. Religious symbolism, especially Taoist, has frequently been used by social groups such as gangsters, local militia, and even on occasion the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), to rally support or create some kind of cohesive force.

Taoism

In southeast China, there were two main orders of Taoism. The first, *ch'uan-chen*, adopted its style of monasticism and austerity from Buddhism, when as an indigenous religion in medieval China it tried to compete with

4. See Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 52. [Hereafter, *Taoist Ritual*.]

5. *Taoist Ritual*, p. 111.

this successful foreign import. The *ch'uan-chen* monasteries preserved much of the old Taoist tradition: yoga, music, herbal lore, medicine, meditation, and so on. In the early twentieth century, Taoist monasteries had the reputation for being utterly corrupt; but some of their bad press came from Christian missionaries, who may have had their judgement impaired by professional rivalry; undoubtedly many practitioners were sincere. It is impossible to establish accurately how many monasteries, and monks and nuns, survived into the twentieth century, but there were probably only a few hundred monasteries in the two provinces, most of them very small. These monasteries were almost all destroyed by the CCP; a handful have been restored in the past few years. The tradition has been shattered, although it may conceivably be revived through the memories of survivors and with the assistance from overseas Chinese.

The second main branch of Taoism is the *cheng-i* sect. *Cheng-i* priests are family men, so-called *huo-chu*, living in the world; they generally train a son as their successor. They act as ritual specialists in communal sacrifices, family requiems, exorcisms, and so on for the local population.⁶ All Taoists were severely persecuted by the CCP. A few thousands seem to have survived in southeast China (although there are many in Taiwan) and again from the 1990s are beginning to ply their trade at the insistent demand

of villagers; many of them, understandably, in fear of government reprisals. It is Taoism which perhaps suffered more than any other religion after 1949. Many thousands of practitioners were apparently shot without trial as charlatans or for alleged anti-CCP activities. Recent statistics suggest that there were some 4,000 Taoist monks or priests in Fukien in 1989, of whom about 200 were from the *ch'uan-chen*, monastic, tradition. However, ritual Taoism

may be the next religion to stage a major comeback in south China, if current reports are reliable. Most folk religious activities require the services of a Taoist priest to lead rituals wherever possible, especially for funerals or to cure sickness.

Buddhism

Buddhism is better known in the West and, despite some difficulties, basic information about it is more accessible than about Taoism. In the Republican period, Buddhism was changing but still retained many traditional features. The core of the

whole system were the elite monasteries, the *shih-fang ts'ung-lin*, of which there were some 300 in the whole of China. The monasteries preserved the orthodox doctrinal Buddhism, teaching establishments where young monks were trained in meditation, scriptural study, and ritual. They were centres of art, music, philosophy, architecture, medicine, printing, and much else, somewhat like the medieval cathedrals and monasteries of Europe. Some of China's finest and most important monasteries were in Fukien and Chekiang, for exam-



The Buddha

6. See *Taoist Ritual*, pp. 40-5, for more details.

ple, T'ien-tung (home of the Ts'ao-tung Ch'an sect) and T'ien-t'ai. Far greater in number were the countless minor monasteries or temples scattered across the Chinese countryside; these monasteries belonged to individual monks or nuns, and were usually passed on to adopted disciples. They provided services—such as requiems—that were always in demand among the rural population. Chekiang and Fukien had large numbers of Buddhist devotees.⁷

Protestantism

There is a rather surprising newcomer to the scene. The growth of Protestantism is one of the most remarkable developments of the twentieth century, and one largely ignored in conventional studies of religion in China. There were only a very few thousand Chinese Protestants and a handful of missionaries in Chekiang and Fukien at the turn of the century. Yet by 1990 Protestants formed the largest organized religious community, numbering well over a million in Chekiang, with a substantial presence in most cities and towns, and church groups in every county. In other respects, Protestant activities—youth groups, Bible distribution, church building, networking nationally and even internationally—were also influential. This growth represents a challenge to theories concerning Chinese religiosity.

It is fortunate that the missionary enterprise is reasonably well documented: in terms of quantitative data, probably the best of any religious movement in China (the Catholic missions were usually even better than the Protestants in this respect). However, it is harder to find documents relating the experience of Chinese Christians written by themselves, and the important indigenous Chinese churches left few written records. The difficulty finding source material is much more serious for the period since 1949, when most

Christian activities were driven underground.

Chekiang was considered relatively well evangelized: its communicants accounted for almost 10 per cent of all Chinese Christians in the 1920s. Missionary activity reached a high point in about 1925. But the anti-Christian movement and the occupation of Chekiang by the revolutionary army of the Northern Expedition in 1926 halted its march. Most missionaries fled the province; the number active in it fell to about one-third, ie, about 150 persons. Numbers recovered somewhat in the 1930s but never regained their previous level. The Nanking (Nanjing) government did not permit violence against church personnel, but many buildings were occupied by troops, and were usually returned in good condition. Church schools had to be registered, were sometimes taken over by local government, and religious instruction was restricted. Evangelization could proceed in theory, but encountered many difficulties in the disturbed environment of floods, famine, bandits, and civil war. In Hangchow, for example, church membership declined between 1923 and 1933, in contrast to its earlier rapid growth. Numbers of missionaries were also restricted by the depression in the world economy, which imposed financial constraints on sending agencies.

The organization that stands out somewhat from other missionary societies was the China Inland Mission (CIM). Founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Hudson Taylor, this body was a non-denominational and largely non-ordained group of individuals determined to convert China to Christianity. The CIM avoided institutional development. On the other hand it was extremely good at evangelizing, and succeeded in establishing small stations in remote parts of China, where few other missionaries ventured.

The two main foreign streams of Christian activity in Chekiang were the CIM and a number of mainline mission societies, primarily the Church Missionary Society (CMS, Anglican) and American Presbyterians, both of

7. Readers may study the overall situation and find useful references in Alan Hunter, *Buddhism Under Deng* (Leeds: LEAPS, No. 7, 1992).

which groups ran a small number of secondary schools, hospitals, and other institutions as well as churches, based in the larger cities: Hangchow, Wenchow (Wenzhou), and Ningpo. The total number of missionaries was between 100 and 300 for most of the Republican period, and the number of communicants rose from around 5,000 at the beginning of the century to around 30,000 in the early 1920s. No detailed figures are available after then, but growth was not rapid: of the two largest societies, the CIM suggests around 12,000 communicants for 1939, and the CMS 12,000 for 1940.

Another strand that must be considered is the Chinese church movements that grew independently of, and sometimes even in opposition to, missionary endeavours. From the turn of the century a number of Chinese Christians believed that any serious development for Chinese Christianity must be on the basis of full independence: only thus could they remove the stigma of being tools in the hands of foreigners, and only then might the religion be accepted by the Chinese masses. This demand became even more urgent with the rise of nationalist sentiment and the anti-Christian movement of the early 1920s. In Chekiang, at least two famous Chinese evangelists made a deep impact on Christian life: Sung Shang-chieh (Song Shangjie, John Sung) and Ni T'o-sheng (Ni Tuosheng, Watchman Nee). The movement founded by Ni is still perhaps the strongest single church group in Chekiang, and is one of the main reasons for the relative success of Christianity in the province.

It is hard to quantify the impact that John Sung and other evangelists of his kind had on the religious life of the province. Sung was the outstanding figure among a large number of fiery evangelists who held revival meetings in hundreds of towns throughout China, sometimes achieving remarkable success in generating emotional response, spontaneous healing and other 'miracles', revival of faith, renewed church attendance, and so on. However, Sung did not see his role at church building, and made no attempt to organize those

who had been touched by his preaching. Nevertheless, the powerful impact, and subsequent enlivening of Christian activities, is well attested, as is the occasional opposition by church members who thought him too obscurantist, charismatic, prejudiced, and ultimately discreditable.

The church groups founded by Ni and his colleagues, on the other hand, have proved immensely durable. Ni was born in 1903 in Fukien, and spent most of his working life prior to 1949 in Fukien, Chekiang and Shanghai. As a young student, he rebelled against the missionary church, but also experienced a deep conversion which left an indelible mark on his life. He became an evangelist, writer, and organizer, the church movement he founded becoming known as the 'Little Flock', the 'Christian Assembly', or the 'Assembly Hall'.

Finally, there were numerous independent Chinese churches, some of which were affiliated to the Church of Christ in China and to the National Conference of Chinese Independent Churches. Many of them appear to have a Presbyterian ecclesiastical background, but had either broken away from missionary influence or had been founded by Chinese Christians themselves. Our estimate for the number of Protestants in Chekiang province is 80,000 by 1949.

During the years of Communist rule, Protestantism spread rapidly⁸ to become the most important institutional religion in south-east China by 1994, apparently deep-rooted and with a large committed core membership. Some questions that need to be further explored are: Does the spread of Protestantism mean a significant shift in underlying religious values, attitudes, and loyalties? Or is it a passing phase? What will be the relationship of the by now rather strong church to the

8. We have analysed the national situation in Hunter and Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, which also reports statistics and other information from Fukien and Chekiang.

newly reviving indigenous practices? How will the government, and local officials, handle the new religious situation?

In *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, we suggested that Protestantism is not simply an institutional alternative to other religions, such as Buddhism or Taoism, but entails a profound shift of consciousness. For example, there is an emphasis on faith, regular private study of the Bible, and monotheism, and believers tend to have an exclusive rather than inclusive attitude towards other religions. It remains to be seen whether a real transformation in religious life has actually taken place, or whether the new 'liberalism', and perhaps the massive influx of wealth from overseas Chinese will lead instead to indigenous Chinese religions regaining a more prominent position. This may perhaps be the case in Wenchow, which during the 1980s was known for its 'Christianity fever'. But, in any event, it seems that religion will continue to play an important role in the life of Chinese people, providing at least some sense of morality, communal solidarity, emotional focus, and spirituality. These qualities are always needed, perhaps especially so at times of social change and disruption and under the heady impact of consumerism.

The Falungong Group

In the late 1990s, the most acute controversy to date erupted between the government and a religious group known as Falungong. Readers interested in the following dispute will find plenty of lively material on the Internet: in a post-modern kind of way, both sides have made sophisticated use of cyberspace to promote their side of the story (for example, see <http://faluninfo.net>). Falungong has even alleged that the government has used high-powered computer techniques to sabotage their web sites in the USA. The government accuses Falungong of conspiracy, lying propaganda, subverting public order and so on. Because of claim and counter-claim, as with many aspects of religious life in China, the truth is not easy to discern.

The founder of Falungong is Mr Li Hongzhi, born in northeast China in the early 1950s. In the early 1990s Mr Li emerged as an outstanding teacher of *qigong*, a meditation technique somewhat similar to hatha yoga, that is practised by



**Mr Li Hongzhi,
the founder of Falungong**

millions of Chinese. It was soon believed that he had psychic powers, such as healing from a distance, and moreover had the facility of transmitting these powers to others. Within a couple of years, Mr Li himself became widely regarded as a person of outstanding charisma and power. Such popularity was bound to attract the attention of the security apparatus; Mr Li emigrated to the USA to avoid the continual harassment to which he was subjected. However, the emigration did not damp down the interest in Falungong, on the contrary, the organization by the late 1990s had literally millions of members: some claimed that its membership was greater than that of the Communist Party itself!

To understand the popularity, one should understand that breathing exercises, physical postures like lotus posture, and meditation are practised extremely widely in China, across all sections of the population. Many take them up for health reasons, others for spiritual development, some for psychic powers. It seems by all accounts that Mr Li has devised a very effective programme for yoga practice, backed up by good organization, and perhaps some kind of powerful personal charisma that reinforces practitioners' own efforts. The doctrines of Falungong are themselves loosely derived from Buddhism and Taoism, representing a kind of synthesis of traditional Chinese beliefs adapted to modern

society. According at least to practitioners, they have experienced countless authenticated cases of phenomena like ESP, healing, clairvoyancy, astral travel, etc as well as overall spiritual well-being. Falungong practitioners are supposed, at least, to abide strictly by the principle of never charging money for their teaching, and the whole movement is dedicated to maintaining high moral standards. Of course, the government disputes all such claims, and maintains that Falungong is a dangerous cult centred around a power-crazed individual who exploits the gullible.

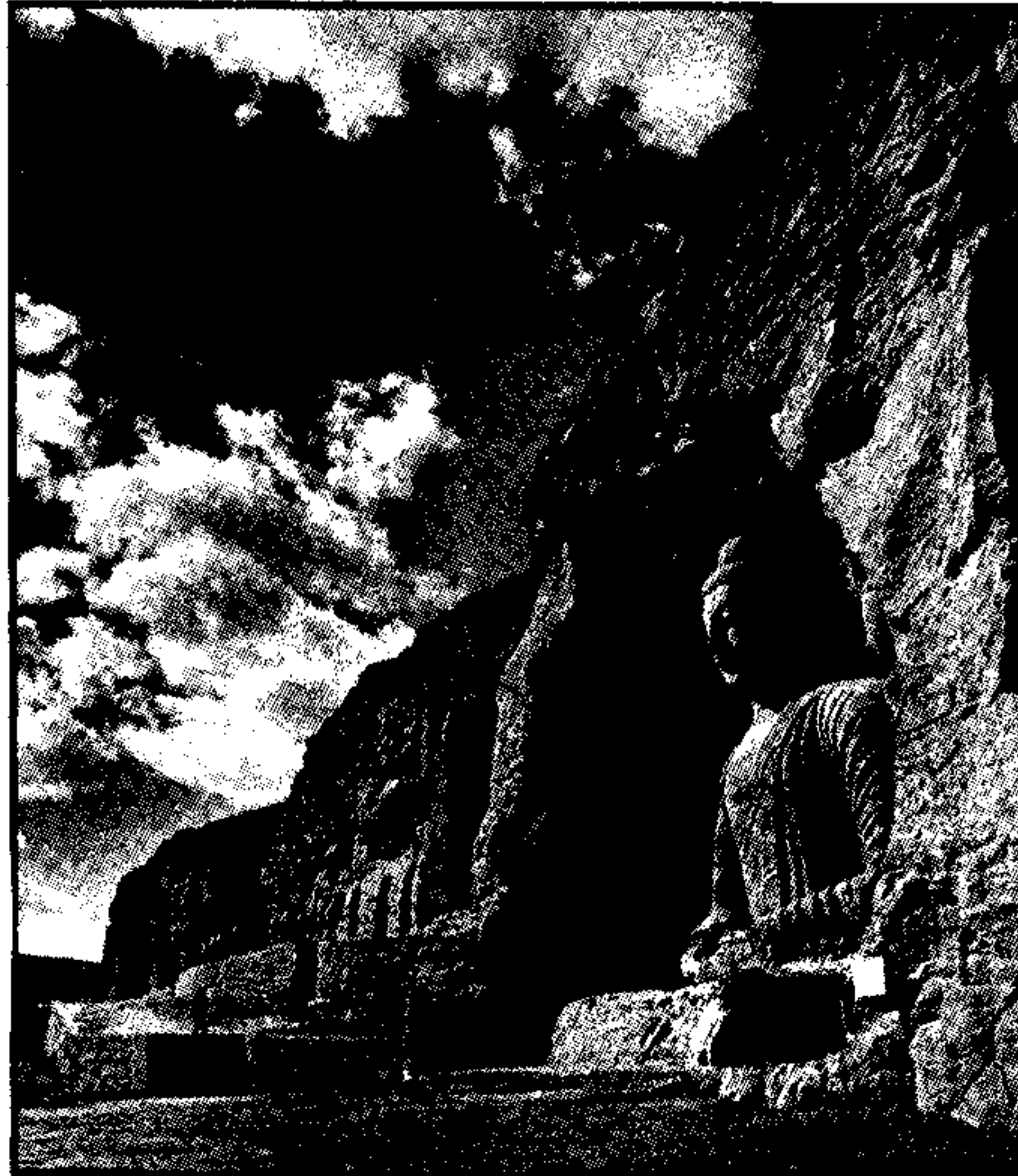
In any event, the whole thing became too much for the government, which, in July 1999 launched a major national crackdown on the movement: there were large-scale arrests across China, especially in Beijing, of persons alleged to be members of the group. This crackdown was accompanied by a near hysterical media campaign against Mr Li. Throughout the summer, hundreds of people were arrested daily, and very soon accounts emerged of vicious human rights abuses such as torture of suspects in detention centres. Amazingly, members of the movement proved rather fearless in their response, and they staged many dignified, usually silent, protests even in Tiananmen Square

in the centre of Beijing. The arrests soured the atmosphere but did little to quell the movement: a similar situation arose in the summer of 2000, with further arrests, protests, and media campaigns.

The government may have cause for concern that the movement borders on the hysterical or that some gullible people may be unduly influenced by power-mongers. On the

other hand, one must assume that the great majority of practitioners are looking for a spiritual life, and are clearly finding something remarkable in Mr Li's teachings. At present (summer 2000) we are far from a final showdown: the government has promised further reprisals, but the practitioners are numerous and determined; and the state can no longer deploy the kind of remorseless and ruthless suppressive techniques that it used against Buddhists and Christians

during the Maoist years. The Chinese people are too sophisticated, assertive, and well-educated now. They have tasted a degree of freedom, human dignity, self-respect, and, if they want it, access to religious ideas: they just would not tolerate a return to hard-line Stalinist techniques. Altogether, the Falungong crisis is quite a meaningful illustration of a society in transition. □



**Cave sanctuaries of northern China:
a Buddha image**

He who has realized the whole universe as his own being and has thus grown beyond all beliefs and dogmas, religions and philosophies—what can bind him, what can limit him. Sects and parties grow when there is weakness, fear, and despair. ... Only the stagnant water of the pool gets foul and not the flowing river water.

—Swami Premananda

Meditations on Madhu Vidyā

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

We are serializing these meditations, based on Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj's talks on Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (Chapter 2). This is the concluding part.

THE FOURTEENTH MEDITATION

अयमात्मा सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्यात्मनः
सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु; यश्चायमस्मिन्नात्मनि तेजोम-
योऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, यश्चायमात्मा तेजोमयोऽमृत-
मयः पुरुषः, अयमेव स योऽयमात्मा; इदममृतं,
इदं ब्रह्म, इदं सर्वम् ॥२.५.१४॥

This Self is (like) honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this Self. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this Self, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul of the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul of each; He indeed is the Self of all. He is all.

We have studied how the different elements, truths, etc and the supreme Reality are honey to each other. We now come to the final meditation: on the Self or Ātman.

It was said that the immortal, infinite being is your true Self or Ātman. Enquire about yourself and reach your true Self. You shall see that this Self can be projected and that everything that is experienced has an outer expression, but the inner core is the same.

What's the conclusion? That you and the Self (Ātman) are everything. You have become this universe; rather, projected this universe. To make us understand this is difficult. We need some gross ideas. So it has been said that the Ātman cannot be described. The Ātman cannot be an object of speech or mind. But as a step, as a principle of sadhana, some positive descriptions are necessary. So some positive descriptions have been given.

स वा अयमात्मा सर्वेषां भूतानामधिपतिः,
सर्वेषां भूतानां राजा; तद्यथा रथनाभौ च रथनेमौ
चाराः सर्वे समर्पिताः, एवमेवास्मिन्नात्मनि सर्वाणि
भूतानि, सर्वे देवाः, सर्वे लोकाः, सर्वे प्राणाः, सर्व
एत आत्मनः समर्पिताः ॥२.५.१५॥

The Self is the ruler of all beings, and the king of all beings. Just as all the spokes are fixed in the nave and the fellow of a chariot-wheel, so are all beings, all creatures, all gods, all worlds, all lives, fixed in the Self.

Consider a wheel. All the spokes are fixed to the centre, the nave and the fellow of a chariot-wheel. In the same way, all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs, and all these individual selves are fixed to this Self. My true Self is the true Self of everything. So with all heavens. Whatever you can think of or read about, are fixed to the Self.

When we hear this, we become afraid. We think: 'How can that be? We are poor human beings, needing three meals. We need a bed to sleep and some people to love. We need a job.' So our world, our desires, are very limited. And we are satisfied with them. Suppose somebody says suddenly: 'You are the king of all; your Self is the emperor of all; you are the centre of everything.' Naturally, this experience cannot come in our waking state. In our waking state, we are preoccupied with so many things, and our whole mind is in our body, in our own selfish interests. We cannot become kings suddenly.

So Vedanta prescribes slow disciplines and slow inquiries. The first thing is that we

should not have any prejudice. If you say, my Bible says so, my scriptures say so, then go to that church or Bible. If you are tied up with some pre-concepts, this knowledge can't come. This Ātman knowledge is for a free mind, a mind which is not prejudiced to anything, not even to God or any book or scripture, but to the Self.

By practising these contemplations day after day with, of course, a disciplined life, it is quite possible that someday this knowledge will be revealed to us in our contemplation. It cannot be revealed for all time. But with time, the experience will increase and, gradually, it is possible that we feel, 'I am that Self' at all times. This is what the Upaniṣads teach: '*aḥam brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman.' And that knowledge will not leave you when death comes. You know this body. Just as the sky and the trees and so many other things are projections of the Self, so this body is also the projection of the Self. So when this body goes, you are not afraid. You will say: 'I, the dweller in this body, am also the dweller in the sky, the dweller in the tree and plant. The Self is one.'

This practically ends the meditations on *madhu*. This great knowledge is called *madhu vidyā*, the honey doctrine.

Now, how was this knowledge communicated through ṛṣis or sages is described in some verses. The knowledge of *madhu* was given to two gods, the Aśvins, by sage Dadhyac. So the knowledge continues to flow down to human beings. We spoke of projection. How does the Self project things?

That Puruṣa or enlightened being has entered the two-footed beings like human beings, birds, etc. Perceiving this, the sage said:

पुरश्चक्रे द्विपदः पुरश्चक्रे चतुष्पदः । पुरः स पक्षी
भूत्वा पुरः पुरुष आविशत् ॥२.५.१८॥

He made bodies with two feet, He made bodies with four feet. He entered into all bodies, and because He dwells within the lotus of the heart, He is known as Puruṣa. There is nothing that is not surrounded by Him, nothing that is not filled with Him.

Just as in a dream we project many things, the Ātman, which never changes, projected and made bodies with two or four feet. And he himself entered them. He entered them as a bird enters the nest. This is mentioned in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. There the *jīvātman* and the *paramātman* are compared to two birds of beautiful plumage. So as a bird he entered these bodies. That has an advantage. He can leave the body whenever he likes!

There is a small point: there's a door here (on the top of the head). When a child is born, if you press that spot, it is soft. That is the door through which the Ātman, the Self, will exit when the time comes. So his name is Puruṣa, *Puri* means the body. He who resides in the body, the master of this body, is the Puruṣa. But he is the supreme Being, he is not little. On account of his dwelling in all bodies, he is called the Puruṣa. In all bodies, he is the indweller. There is a Vedic hymn called the '*Puruṣa Sūkta*'. In it, the Puruṣa is adored as having entered every segment of the universe.

There is nothing that is not covered by him. Just as some soldiers come and advance towards the city, like when the Germans came and occupied country after country and declared themselves rulers, the Puruṣa enters the body and becomes master of everything. He pervades everything.

Śaṅkara explains this part as follows: '*There is nothing that is not covered by him; likewise, there is nothing that is not pervaded by him.*' That is, everything is enveloped by him as its inside and outside. In the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, the first verse says: 'Everything has to be covered by God, the Self.' In this world everything is evanescent. But if you know the Self and cover everything with It, then nothing will go.

Thus it is he who has name and form, and as the body and organs, is inside and outside everything. In the mantra we are discussing, 'he made bodies' etc briefly enunciates the unity of the Self.

Now, we said God or Self has entered all bodies. Does it mean even the bodies of the cat and the dog? Yes, they too. The cat will not

remain a cat for all time to come. In some future life it will become something else. It will pass through many stages to become man. If there is the true Self in reality in everything—the tree and creeper—one day they will know that. 'The tree is my external form, but I am really that infinite Reality.' In Hindu mythology, there is mention of animals having Self-knowledge.

Time is of no concern here. The Upaniṣads think of time as just a moment. Time and space are creations of the Self. What is length of time? That can vary, just as in a dream. In dream we may have an event of one year in moments.

Therefore, when we look at the world, we

should have this perspective that everything great or small, animal or human, have the infinite Self within them all. The Upaniṣad says that the Lord appears as manifold on account of superimposition. Brahman, out of sport, has projected all this.

These teachings are necessary in the beginning in order for the mind to understand. Slowly our mind will see that this creation is just like a dream. It is not real. All that you read about this is not real. It is only Brahman or the Self that is there all the time. The *madhu* mantras are concluded thus: **'This Brahman is without an earlier or later, without an inside or outside. This Brahman is the Self, the Ātman. This is the final teaching.'** □

Spiritual Maxims

The only way to lasting peace is complete surrender to the will of God. Restlessness destroys all peace of mind. When the mind becomes restless one should pray earnestly to God, for He alone is the abode of peace.

Constant recollection of God will bring an overflowing blessedness. The only real purpose of human life is the search for Reality. To know the Reality we must meditate. Therefore, the spiritual aspirant should make the practice of meditation a regular habit. The early morning is the best time for spiritual practices. The sacred hours before sunrise are better than any other time of the day or night for the practice of inwardness.

The tribulations of the world indirectly drive the mind towards God. The more you are troubled and tortured in the world, the more you will think of God, and know it for certain that loving remembrance of God severs all our attachments to the world.

As long as a man remains satisfied with earthly enjoyments and attainments, he has not started on the spiritual path; and when the pangs of separation from God pierce the mind, the time for God-vision is at hand.

A true devotee asks nothing of God but pure love for Him. Even as a child depends entirely upon its mother, so the devout soul depends entirely upon God.

God is with form, and also without form; again, He is beyond both. He transcends all our conceptions of Him. He can be meditated upon in any one of His multifarious aspects.

—Swami Shivananda (*Mahapurush Maharaj*)

Human Genome—The Language of Life

DR GURUDAS CHATTERJEE

The human being is the centre of study now. As if talking Vedanta, the genome says that 98.8% human beings have similar genes. The author, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, has been associated with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi, since its inception in 1988 as its Administrator.

More than a decade ago, following the press announcement of the establishment of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) in New Delhi and its charter of activities, this writer received a letter from a gentleman from a district town in West Bengal, entreating the Centre to help him combat a family disease. It seems that for generations the male members of the family have been suffering from very high blood pressure from an early age, impairing their livelihood, and all of them had succumbed to it before the age of fifty. Unfortunately, on the basis of the knowledge prevailing then, and also as of now, no relief could be suggested. But with the announcement of the sequencing of human genes by Celera and National Institute of Health, both of USA, and the Sangar Institute of UK, there is every possibility that at least the next generation of this cursed family will be rid of this malady, which has been passed on from one generation to the other.

Before we embark on the significance of this development, let us examine some of the salient features of what the scientists have found. 97% of the human genome, that is, the complete set of human genes, containing three billion DNA 'letters' (to be explained later) has been mapped, of which 85% has been accurately sequenced. If the letters were spread out one millimetre apart, they would cover a distance of 3,000 km. It is estimated that there are between 30,000 and 40,000 genes in the human body, far fewer than once thought, compared to some 26,000 in some plants, 18,000 in some worms, and 4,000 in the tuberculosis microbe.

97% of the DNA in the human genome is 'junk', ie, they don't have any known function, and 98.8% people have the same genes. In other words, basically all human beings are the same—as propounded by Vedanta and re-emphasized by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji—and the discrimination on grounds of birth, colour, race and caste is purely artificial.

To understand the significance of the human genome, a few basic facts may be discussed first. Practically, all high school students know that human beings have 23 pairs of chromosomes, and the human genome or the complete set of human genes is to be found in the chromosomes. Each chromosome is one pair of very long DNA molecules which are long chains of sugar and phosphate. The chain consists of four substances—adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine—represented by the alphabets A, C, G, T. The genes can replicate themselves by pairing A with T and G with C. So a DNA which is a double helix will have, in each of its strands, the arrangement of ATGC (A opposite T, G opposite C, and so on). Genetic engineering now extensively employs tools of splicing the DNA and joins any two bits to create a new combination under appropriate conditions, a technique known as recombinant DNA technology. It also enables to transfer genes from one host to another, thus creating transgenic systems. The latter has been very successfully done in plants in a variety of plant specimens to create insect resistant, healthier and more nutritious progenies. It is estimated that a minimum of 40% of

the total corn production in USA is now obtained from such transgenic crop. As far as human health is concerned, the scene is a little more complex because the human system has 100 trillion (million million) cells and their genetic manipulation would involve inserting a gene in all the relevant cells. But transgenic animals are no longer a rarity and many transgenic species of mice have been developed successfully and are now routinely used in laboratories working on genetic engineering.

As a matter of fact, many such transgenic animals have wide commercial applications as they can be turned into the production of valuable human products and pharmaceuticals by choosing the right kind of gene. Similar attempts are now being made to develop edible vaccines for human and animal systems where leaves and fruits are made to act as hosts, thus eliminating the need for an elaborate health care delivery system. One very significant development is the exciting possibility of new drugs being discovered, as the number of known proteins being targeted against diseases has suddenly multiplied tenfold, and this explains why the drug companies are funding this research.

Let us now briefly examine how the knowledge of the human genome can help mankind in the prevention and treatment of diseases. But before that, it may be worthwhile to understand how diseases occur in the human system due to gene disorder. For this purpose, let us take the example of blood groups of people. These, as we know, are of three basic types: A, B, and O. People with type A can donate to those with A and AB; those with B to those with B and AB; those with O can donate to anybody as it is a universal type. In 1990, the gene for the blood groups was discovered, and it was found that the gene responsible for A, B, O lies in chromosome 9, and the groups are actually three versions of the same gene. The gene is the recipe for making a protein with the ability to catalyze a chemical reaction. The difference between the A gene and the B gene lies in a few letters but

these little differences are sufficient to make the protein significantly different to cause an immune reaction to the wrong blood. The O group has a single letter missing compared with A, with the result that due to this mutation, a different protein is made with different properties. It is now well established that resistance to different diseases is offered by the proteins and the link between disease and mutation in genes has provided valuable insight in tackling diseases. For example, scientists have noticed that sickle cell anaemia is linked with the prevalence of malaria. The sickle cell mutation which causes blood cells to collapse in the absence of oxygen is frequently fatal to those with two copies of the gene in the chromosome, but only mildly harmful to those with just one copy. So those with one copy are by and large resistant to malaria. Similar links have been found between the genetic disease cystic fibrosis and the infectious disease typhoid. The one genetic disease which all expecting parents dread, viz, Down Syndrome, is due to the presence of three copies in the chromosome 21, instead of the customary two. The presence of the extra copy in the otherwise normal humans leads to mental retardation, in the form of Alzheimer's disease and death at an early age. Thanks to medical genetics, it is now possible to detect it in the foetus.

Finally, let us take the case of cancer and also cholesterol and heart disease. Cancer means excessive or uncontrolled growth of tissue and is caused by oncogenes. But our system has to have oncogenes, as otherwise we will not grow. We need cells to grow and proliferate all the time, even after we attain full growth as the skin must be replaced, new blood cells generated, wounds healed, etc. What is needed is the mechanism for allowing normal growth but suppressing potential cancer. The system therefore also provides tumor suppressor genes whose job is to regulate the growth of cells. Any malfunctioning in the tumor suppressing genes such as due to mutation in any part of the DNA, whereby the

normal arrangement of the letters A,T,G,C is disturbed, is likely to cause unchecked growth of tumors in the body. It therefore follows that the remedy will lie in correcting the mutation. Although opinions differ, the majority view as of now is that there is a direct relation between cholesterol and heart disease. There is a set of genes called APO genes which occur in four varieties A, B, C, and E. These genes play an important role in ensuring that the cholesterol in our system does its work properly. If they are not working, the cholesterol and fat stay in the bloodstream and can build up on the walls of the arteries as atherosclerosis. It has been found that mice with no APO E gene get atherosclerosis. This gene comes in three versions and the versions are only marginally different from each other in the sense that in some the letter A is replaced by the letter G. They, however, all vary in their efficiency in removing triglycerides from the blood and hence vary in their susceptibility to heart disease. It has also been found that people with two genes of the same variant of one of the E genes are more susceptible to Alzheimer's disease which sets in at an advanced age and results in loss of memory. Genetic screening on the existence and frequency of this variety of E gene in human beings can provide some

inkling, though not definitive, about the possibility of getting either disease.

To sum up, the human genome has opened new horizons in the quest of human knowledge for the detection, prevention and cure for several diseases which have been baffling us. It is true that some of the expectation or enthusiasm may be premature and many more milestones may have to be crossed before the fruits of research are available to mankind. Genetic engineering of both plant and mammalian systems has already drawn a lot of flak from environmentalists. Genetically modified food is still banned in Europe, though it is available for sale in the USA. Complete cloning of animals like the laboratory-produced sheep Dolly has given rise to fears that some mad scientist somewhere may attempt creating human beings. Such negative aspects cloud public judgement and vision and take away many beneficial aspects of it, such as making of vaccines, laboratory production of organs for human transplant, or making plants intrinsically resistant to pests, thus eliminating the use of pesticides or producing crops and vegetables with more nutritional content. The choice whether we will use it for the good of humanity or as a tool for the destruction of mankind rests with us. □

Principles of Holy Living

Be humble, for the worst thing in the world is of the same stuff as you. Be confident, for the stars are of the same stuff as you.

What is it to be a gentleman? To be the first to thank and the last to complain. It is better that your good deed be forgotten than that your evil deed should make you famous. A lake at the foot of a mountain is a mirror for the mountain; just so is the past a mirror for mankind.

Different languages are but the same prayer; different prayers are but the same God. Never in prayer try to teach God what He should do for you, but rather ask Him what you should do for Him. God may be either accompanying you or pursuing you. It depends on you.

—Nicholai Velimirovic

Vedanta Society of Northern California Turns 100

A REPORT

The Vedanta philosophy as taught and lived by Sri Ramakrishna and his great disciple Swami Vivekananda came to northern California one hundred years ago last year. Its main channel, the Vedanta Society of Northern California, was started by Swami Vivekananda on 14 April 1900. Following Swami Vivekananda, three of his brother disciples taught in the Bay Area—Swamis Turiyananda, Trigunatitananda and Abhedananda—the two former as leaders of the Society. Then other swamis, following in the footsteps of these spiritual giants, led the organization, bringing it to its well-established position today.

Swami Trigunatitananda built the Old Temple, the first Hindu temple in the West, in 1906. When the Society required a more spacious facility, the New Temple was built and dedicated in 1959.

Vedanta is taught by means of lectures and classes in which its principles are explained and a general idea is given concerning the practices one must undertake so that spiritual ideas may become realities in one's life. For those wishing to know more about Vedanta and who wish to undertake spiritual practice, the swami in charge gives specific instructions and guidance.

In addition to the regular services in the temple, the birthdays of the world's great spiritual teachers, in addition to other special occasions such as Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Guru

Purnima, and so on are also celebrated. The Society has a bookshop, with a wide variety of religious books and a fine library, Sri Sarada Library. Sunday School classes are held each week for children six to fourteen years of age, to give them a general knowledge of the universal truths of Vedanta, to acquaint them with the basic teachings of the major living religions, and to inspire reverence for the great religious teachers of the world.

A monastery and a convent are maintained by the Society, thus giving an opportunity to young men and women to devote themselves exclusively to spiritual life 'for one's own salvation and for the good of the world.'

Since its founding, the Society has acquired three retreats in California. Shanti Ashrama was gifted to Swami Vivekananda in 1900 by a Vedanta

devotee, Minnie Boock, and established by Swami Turiyananda in the same year. Swami Turiyananda lived and taught there for nearly two years. Swami Trigunatitananda as well as his successor Swami Prakashananda and some Vedanta students held month-long retreats in the ashrama over the years until 1926. For the last twenty years an annual pilgrimage has been made to the ashrama and a day-long programme is held. The Lake Tahoe retreat located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains about 250 miles from San Francisco was purchased in the 1930s. The Olema retreat, a 2,000-acre forest retreat in Marin County, was acquired



Swamis Prabuddhanandaji and Smarananandaji at the inaugural programme in the New Temple

in the 1940s. Special retreat programmes are held in Lake Tahoe as well as Olema. One of the main community services of the Olema retreat are the retreat houses for men as well as women where individuals or groups, Vedantins as well as those from other traditions, can make a retreat for several days' duration or longer. In addition to places for meditation, a reading room containing books on religion and philosophy is provided. An important event held in Olema is the annual five-day programme during May. As part of that programme, there is a Youth Forum on universal spiritual values for young adults. Panelists discuss how they view spiritual values in their lives and answer questions from other young adults. On Memorial Day a guest speaker from a different religious tradition is invited to speak. In commemoration of the Vedanta Society's centenary, which fell last year, a special interfaith programme was held. There were five guest speakers representing Judaism, Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, and Vedanta.

Centenary Celebrations

The Vedanta Society of Northern California has the distinction and honour of having been started by Swami Vivekananda. Throughout the year 2000 the Society had been celebrating its centenary with a variety of special programmes. Swami Smaranananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the year-long observance in the New Temple on the evening of 14 April 2000, by ceremonially lighting the lamp on the beautifully decorated altar. This was followed by a short, colourful historical overview of the Society by Sister Gargi and a concise talk on the 'Ideals of the

Ramakrishna Movement' by Swami Smaranananda.

The year 2000 marked Shanti Ashrama's hundredth anniversary also. The annual pilgrimage there on 29 April 2000, centred around Swami Turiyananda, its founder, and his teachings, as well as the ashrama's beginnings as the first retreat centre in the West. The programme also included talks on the history of the ashrama, tours of the property, as well as special historical and photographic displays depicting the ashrama's history and the dedicated spiritual seekers associated with its

development. Swami Shantarupananda of Portland, the special guest speaker, added a lively touch to the afternoon discussion.

The focus of the Society's Memorial Day Retreat held on 29 May 2000, at the Vedanta Retreat, Olema, was an interfaith meeting. Dr Houston Smith, well-known author, speaker, and

leading figure and authority on comparative philosophy and history of religions, introduced the interfaith programme with five religions represented: Judaism, Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, and Vedanta. The guest speakers were Rabbi Jonathan Slater, rabbi of Congregation Beth Ami in Santa Rosa; Reverend Heng Sure, currently director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery; Murshida Batul of the East Bay Sufi Women's Group; Sister Mary Margaret of our Lady Grace Monastery in Beach Grove, Indiana, and Swami Smaranananda of the Ramakrishna Order. Their topic was 'Exploring Our Common Spiritual Ground.' Each speaker sought to explain the essence of his or her religion, showing its kinship with other faiths. The speakers readily answered questions from the audience of 1,240 during the spirited and fruitful discus-



Devotees listening to a talk by Sister Gargi

sion series that followed the talks.

On Guru Purnima, 16 July 2000, three women monastics took the final vows of sannyasa. The previous evening a reception was held in the New Temple for the visiting swamis who had come to participate in the celebration. The public programme featured worship, meditation, and devotional singing, as well as an inspiring talk on 'The Spiritual Teacher' by Swami Sarvagatananda of Boston and Providence, and 'Illuminating Anecdotes from the Lives of Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples' by Swami Swahananda of Hollywood,

Swami Pramathananda of Toronto, and Swami Chetanananda of St Louis. The swamis shared some fascinating stories of some of the great souls of our Vedantic tradition.

Swami Bhaskarananda of Seattle, and Swami Chidananda of Chicago, inaugurated the hundredth anniversary historical exhibit in the Sri Sarada Library in the New Temple on 31 December 2000. The exhibit depicted the hundred years of the Society's history through photographs, letters, displays, and other memorabilia. On 1 January 2001, there was a special worship in honour of Sri Sarada Devi's birthday and the New Year. The programme also included *homa*, meditation, devotional singing, flower offerings by devotees, and readings from the teachings of Holy Mother. In the afternoon Swami Chidananda gave an insightful picture of Holy Mother in his talk on 'Sri Sarada Devi: An Adept in Yoga.' Swami Bhaskarananda's talk on 'Sri Ramakrishna, a Master of Disguise' presented Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual genius in a creative and unusual way.

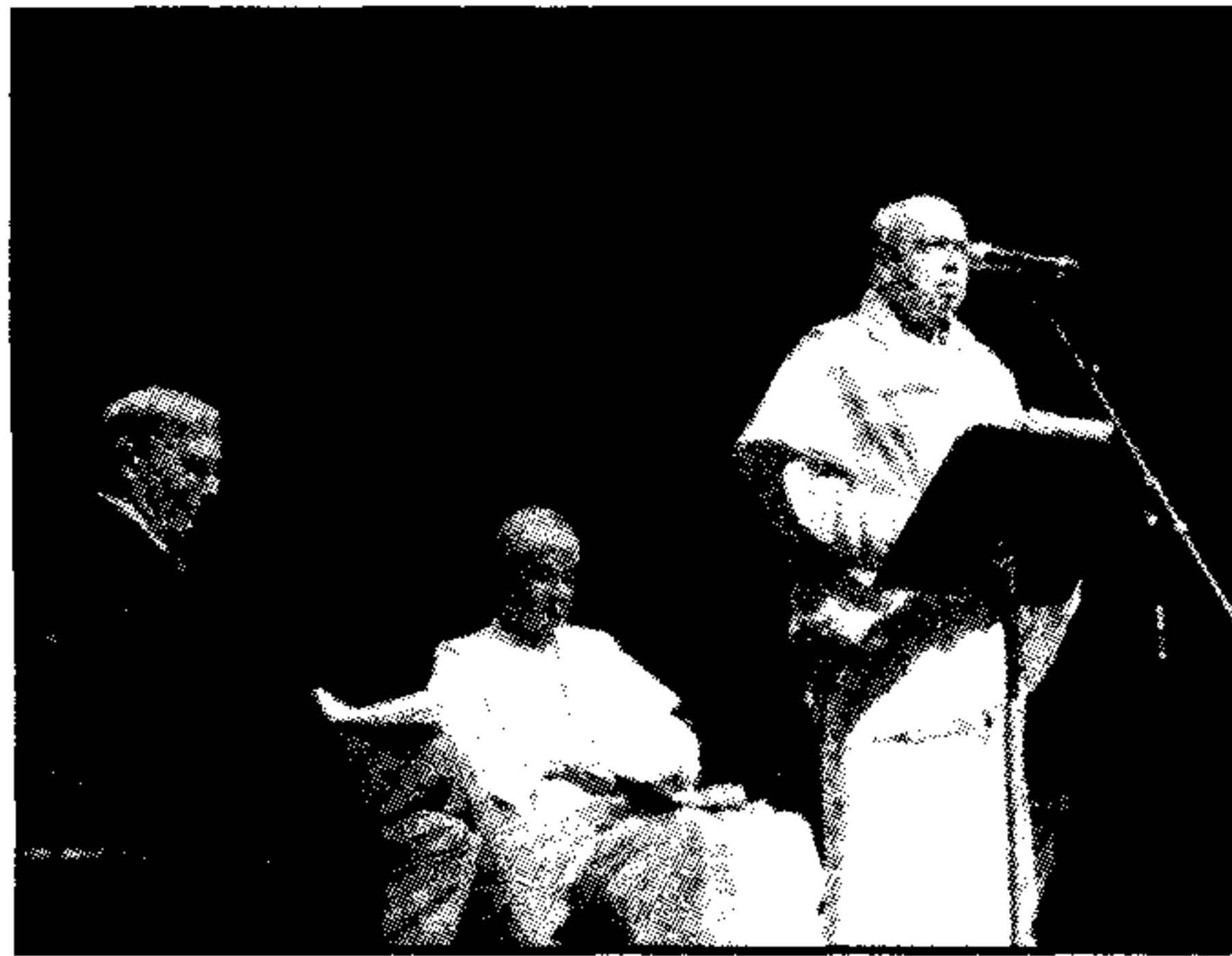
The Centennial Celebration Finale was

held on 10 March 2001, at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. The palace constructed for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915 was a fitting venue for the finale. In the spacious lobby a seven-foot picture of Swami Vivekananda surrounded by festive floral decorations stood majestically welcoming all who entered. The Vedanta Society bookshop had a selection of books for sale, and the Ali Akbar Khan School of Music also had booths in the lobby. The programme's main feature was a devout musical offering by Swarasamrat Ali Akbar Khan as well as his son Alam

Khan on sarod, accompanied by Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri, who has been acknowledged as one of the greatest tabla masters of the world. The spell-binding concert was well received by an audience of approximately 800.

The musical performance was followed by two talks given by Mr Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez, executive director of the

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, as well as the founder and executive director of the Peace Council, an organization with a membership of about twenty-five of the world's foremost spiritual leaders, who spoke with much feeling on 'Interreligious Understanding and Vedanta,' and Swami Adiswarananda of New York, whose subject was 'Swami Vivekananda and Practical Spirituality.' The swami's talk laced with humour presented the profound message that Swami Vivekananda brought for all of us. A reception in the lobby concluded the grand celebration, which was widely appreciated by all who attended. The Society's centennial observance officially ended with this event. □



**Concluding programme at the Palace of Fine Arts:
Mr Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez and Swami Adiswarananda
listening to Swami Prabuddhananda**

Shiva or Vishnu?

Not so long ago, Maharashtra presented the world with an abundance of wonderful saints. These saints brought a genuine change in the spiritual ardour of the world through their devotion, spiritual experiences, *abhangas*, devotional literature and spiritual lustre. A small image of Lord Krishna, called Panduranga Vitthala, at Pandharapur, became the centre around which such a huge web of spirituality was built. *Saints of Maharashtra* by Savitribai Khanolkar, from where we have got the idea for this story, presents the lives of many of these saints beautifully.

The world loves variety. All cannot appreciate the same God. If some love Krishna, some others may love Shiva, and so on. There was a saint who believed in such differences. He loved Shiva. He hated Vishnu and his temples. He is the hero of our story.

Narahari was born in Devagiri. He learnt to read and write. But the way of the scholar was not to be his path. His father's profession called him, and he gave up his studies and began to help his father in the goldsmith profession. His surname was Sonar—the jeweller who makes golden ornaments. His father was not faring well, but the family occupation had to be continued somehow for want of a better opportunity. So Narahari too was taught the art of jewellery-making. He became proficient in the traditional art, and his father heaved a sigh of relief; he had no more to worry about his son. Soon his father died. Narahari continued his father's work, and gained a little name too as a good jeweller. But the prospects in Devagiri were bleak during those days.

Indian villages are what they are, and Narahari's days weren't any better. People discussed everything under the sun, and decided everything according to their whims. Many would take hasty decisions, and people

suggested that Narahari should shift over to some more prosperous country instead of suffering here, where business prospects were bleak.

Narahari was in a fix. He didn't know what to do. He had heard about the glory of Pandharapur, about its richness, etc. But he couldn't decide on leaving the ancestral house and going away to some unknown place.

Narahari had a method of his own to solve problems. He loved Lord Shiva dearly. He would pray to Him day and night. He would worship the Lord with great fervour. When in trouble, he would resort to his chosen deity, Shiva, always. This time, when he had to take such a momentous decision, he decided to pray to Shiva. After vacillating for some days, Narahari finally decided to settle down at Pandharapur.

Pandharapur was a town of Krishna or Vishnu devotees. Narahari felt as if he were in a desert. To his utter dismay, he found that he was alone in the town, so to say. Everyone spoke about Panduranga, sang His praises, worshiped Him, adored Him... Wherever had he arrived? Why, no one spoke of his dear Lord Shiva at all! Narahari thought: 'Who is this Krishna or Vishnu? Who is Panduranga, after all? My Shiva can create a thousand such Pandurangas, and people are mad after this god.' What a noise these devotees of Panduranga make, thought Narahari when he heard their kirtans, and saw their dances and devotional practices. He had heard about, and also seen, saints like Namadev and Jnaneswar, who would lead the chorus singing. He had witnessed their congregational devotion many times. Narahari felt all this to be extravagant. Shiva was easily pleased; offer a little water on his head and he is happy. But this Vishnu wants such a lot of things, thought

Narahari. Narahari would worship his Shiva with great care and dedication and thought it useless to convince people of the glory of Shiva. He stayed aloof. He decided not to bend his head before Panduranga.

Narahari soon earned fame as a very good goldsmith. He did his work with devotion, and so his jewellery, made with utmost care, were fine pieces of art. And since he was a devotee, there was absolutely no question of any sort of cheating at all. So he made a name.

A rich man came to Narahari one day. He wanted to donate an ornament to Lord Panduranga, and so requested Narahari to prepare one for him. He had decided on a silver ornament which, like a belt, could be tied round the Lord's waist. Such an ornament is called *kargota* in Marathi language. This was an important ornament of yesteryears.

Narahari was of course ready to have a customer, but he didn't want to go to the Panduranga temple for measurements. 'Sir,' he said to the rich man, 'I shall gladly do the job for you. But kindly bring the exact measurements yourself.' The rich man did as he was told.

A grand ornament was ready in days. The rich man took the ornament, measured it against the scale, and took it to the Panduranga temple to offer it to the Lord. No, the silver belt wouldn't fit. It was tight. In spite of applying force, it couldn't be put on the Lord's image. Disappointed, the rich man returned to Narahari.

'I had given you the exact measurements, but still you have made a small one. I'm ashamed,' cried the rich man. Narahari patiently asked the gentleman: 'Did you bring the exact measurements to me?' The gentleman replied firmly: 'Yes!'

The rich man knew Narahari was the best jeweller around. And a devotee wishes to offer the best things to the Lord. So he requested Narahari, 'O Sonar! Why don't you come and take the measurements yourself? Do you want me to fail in this service to Sri Hari?' Narahari flatly refused to go. 'But why?' asked the rich

man in surprise. 'I don't want to see any Vishnu image in my life. It's against my principles,' said the 'iconoclast' Narahari. The rich man thought Narahari was yet another bigot. He said: 'You see, I want this offering to be made at any cost. If you wish, we could tie up your eyes before our Lord. You can measure with your hands and bring the measurements to your shop. What harm is there in this arrangement?'

To go to a Vaishnava temple? Narahari was hesitant, but the 'blinding' arrangement seemed appropriate. He prayed to Shiva to pardon him the transgression of stepping into a Vishnu temple, and went with the rich man.

Once inside the temple, Narahari's eyes were tied up. Narahari began taking measurements of the god he did not like to see. He began to feel the image. Surprise of surprises! The touch appeared to be something different! Was he touching the Shiva image? He moved his hands towards the face. He couldn't be mistaken because he being a gold-artist knew the Shiva image too well to be deceived. There was the matted hair, there were the three eyes. Yes, there was the snake! He murmured: 'What's all this?' and tore the cloth away from his eyes. To his astonishment, it was the Panduranga image and not of Shiva. But where was the snake, the three eyes, the matted locks ...?

He tied the bandage again like one mad and began to feel the image. Onlookers watched Narahari, behaving like a madman inside the sanctum. Narahari's touch convinced him again that it was not a Vishnu image but a Shiva image. This time he carefully felt the image, and there was absolutely no doubt.

He removed the cloth once more. He opened his eyes. No, it was not he, but the smiling Panduranga who had opened his dear devotee's eyes. Narahari Sonar was moved to torrential tears. He cried: 'O Lord! Forgive this fool!' He knelt before the Lord and prostrated again and again. □

News and Reports

Ramakrishna Museum Inaugurated

The newly built Ramakrishna Museum at Belur Math was inaugurated on 7 May 2001 (Buddha Purnima) by Most Revered Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, who gave a short benedictory address (*see p. 396*) at the public meeting organized on this occasion. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Dr Saroj Ghose, former President of the International Council of Museums, and Swami Prabhanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, and the moving spirit behind the museum, also addressed the gathering.

New Multimedia CD

In our present-day world where knowledge and information rule supreme, the common man is bombarded, as it were, by varied and conflicting trends of thought, blasting age-old values and customs. Although technology has linked peoples and cultures together and has brought tremendous amount of information at the click of a mouse, humanity is finding itself delinked and drifting away from old moorings. This requires religion to take up a new responsibility today—of entering a new dimension to fill up the spiritual vacuum created in and by cyberspace.

The Ramakrishna Mission had foreseen the potentiality of this new field and had all along tried to make some significant contribution to it. Some of its hopes saw fruit on 29 May 2001, when a new multimedia CD on *Swami Vivekananda's Life, Work and Research* was brought out by Advaita Ashrama in Kolkata at one of Music World's outlets on Park Street.

Swami Bodhasaranandaji, Manager, Advaita Ashrama, introduced the CD to the audience and presented the first copy to Sri Manab Mukherjee, Minister of Information Technology, Government of West Bengal, who then formally released it. In his speech, the minister lauded the Mission's successful attempt to bring Swami Vivekananda and his message to techno-savvy people all over the world.

Thanks to the praiseworthy dedication of Mr Mani Shankar Mukherjee, Chief Adviser (Corporate Relations) to the famous RPG Group, the gala event caught the full attention of the media and was beamed to millions of Indian homes by some of the best-known satellite TV channels. Most of the leading English, Bengali and Hindi dailies also gave

good coverage of the event. Soon, the small ripple sent out by Advaita Ashrama returned in the form a huge wave of demand for the CDs.

Priced at a modest Rs 700, the CD contains the two-volume *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his eastern and western disciples, his *Complete Works*, and Marie Louise Burke's (now Sister Gargi) six-volume *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. It also contains all the photographs of Swamiji besides the booklets *World Thinkers on Swami Vivekananda* and *Vivekananda for Children*. In terms of pages, more than 10,000 of them have been compressed into this one CD. A benediction by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, brief information about the centres of the Ramakrishna Order, etc complete the picture. A good word-search facility, an additional index search for the *Complete Works* and a glossary are also incorporated.

The CD is specially designed to help Swamiji's followers and research students with easy access to his life and teachings.

Swami Hiranmayanandaji Passes Away

Swami Hiranmayanandaji passed away on 18 May 2001 at 10.55 pm at Belur Math. He was 92. For nearly a year, he had been suffering from advanced colon cancer and various old-age ailments.

Initiated in 1929 by Srimat Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, he joined the Order at Belur Math in 1933 and had sannyasa from Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj in 1943. He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1973, and served as the General Secretary of the Order from April 1985 to February 1989. Apart from serving as head of Rangoon Sevashrama, Deoghar, Vrindaban, Baghbazar, Bombay and Delhi centres, he was the founder Secretary of Purulia Vidyapith and served in various capacities at Bhubaneswar, Madras Math, Gol Park and Mysore centres. From April 1985 till he passed away, Revered Maharaj was also on the Board of Trustees of the Advaita Ashrama.

A scholar with wide interests, he was well-read in Sanskrit, English and Bengali literature. He also authored a few books which have been well received by the public. Loved for his large heart and open mind, he showed active interest in all matters concerning the Math and Mission till the end of his life.